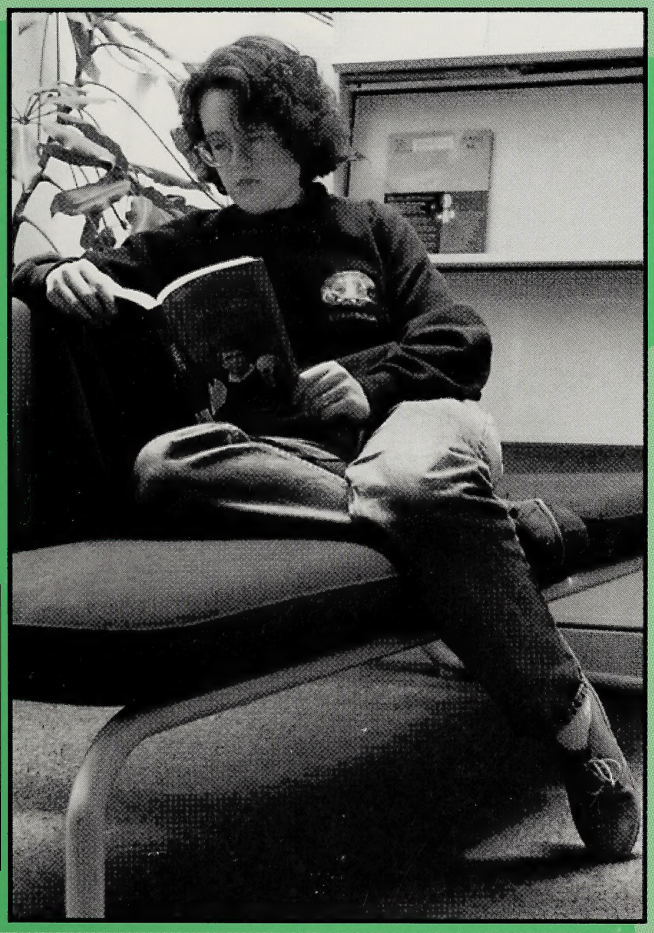
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English 30

Module 5

Hamlet



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English 30

Module 5

Hamlet

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Module 5
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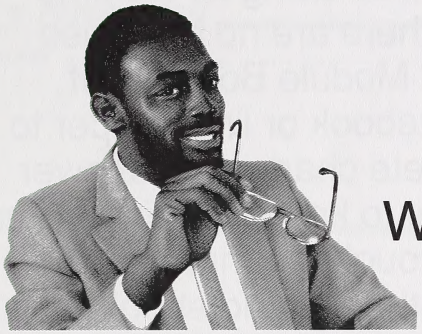
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Welcome to Module 5!

We hope you'll enjoy your study of *Hamlet*.

We've included a prerecorded audiocassette with this module. The cassette will help you work through the material and it will enhance your listening skills.

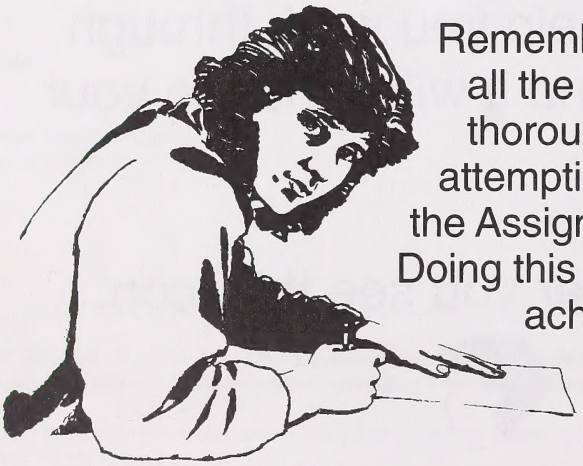
So whenever you see this icon,



turn on your tape and listen.

One important resource you'll be using all the time is your notebook. Because there are no response lines provided in the Student Module Booklets of this course, you'll need a notebook or lined paper to respond to questions, complete charts, and answer questionnaires. It's important to keep your lined paper handy as you work through the material and to keep your responses together in a notebook or binder for review purposes later. Read all of the questions carefully, and respond to them as completely as possible. Then compare your responses with the ones supplied in the Appendix.

Some of your personal responses you'll be asked to keep in a separate folder – your Writing Folder. This process is explained in Module 1.



Remember to work through all the module activities thoroughly before attempting the questions in the Assignment Booklet. Doing this will help you to achieve better success in your studies.

Good luck.

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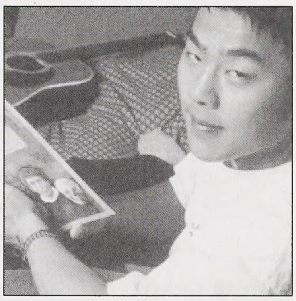


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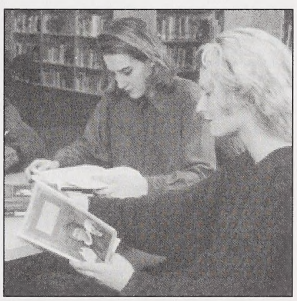


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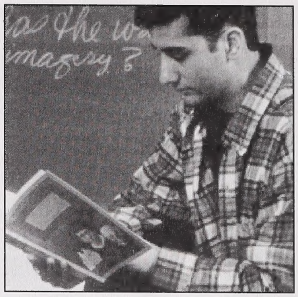


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MODULE OVERVIEW

He was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.

Hamlet spoke these moving words about his dead father to his good friend Horatio, but they might just as well apply to Shakespeare himself. In the opinion of most critics, Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest dramatist who ever lived.

Why are his plays so enduring? And why is *Hamlet* in particular the most beloved of his thirty-seven plays?

Part of the answer lies with the appeal of the play's protagonist, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark. His pain and his suffering are very human and very compelling for any witness to the play. It's easy to identify with this melancholic prince who's burdened with an enormous responsibility – avenging his father's "foul and most unnatural murder." Like the enigmatic Mona Lisa, Hamlet's character is not easily deciphered, and each generation tries to come up with its own definitive interpretation of this classic drama.

It's appropriate to pose questions about *Hamlet* because the play is in many ways about questions, not answers. For example, the very first line of the play is a question: "Who's there?" And then, of course, there's the play's most famous line: "To be, or not to be: That is the question." Hamlet asks many questions that span the gamut of human experience – death, corruption, evil, human nature, suicide, immortality, self-discovery, and moral choices. These are issues as germane to today's world as they were to Shakespeare's.

In the end, though, it will be best for you to discover *Hamlet* for yourself and to seek out answers to your own questions.

Prepare yourself for an intriguing and careful reading of Shakespeare's most written about – and most frequently performed – play: *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.*



Hamlet

Section 1: "Something Is Rotten in the State of Denmark"

Section 2: "To Be, or Not To Be"

Section 3: "The Readiness Is All"

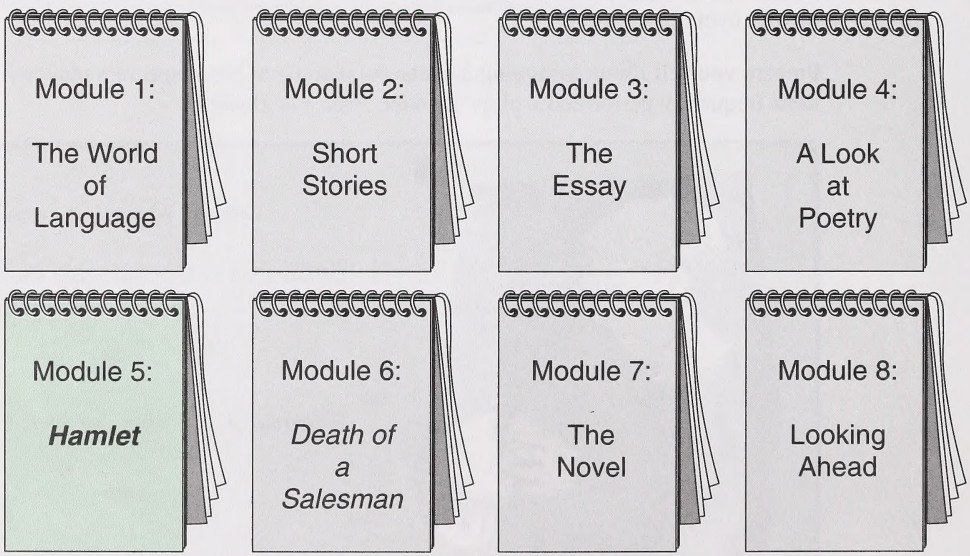
Evaluation

Your mark in this module will be determined by how well you complete the work in your Assignment Booklet. In this module you must complete three section assignments and one final module assignment. The mark distribution is as follows:

Section 1 Assignment	**20 marks**
Section 2 Assignment	**20 marks**
Section 3 Assignment	**20 marks**
Final Module Assignment	**40 marks**
TOTAL	**100 marks**

COURSE OVERVIEW

English 30 contains eight modules.



SECTION 1

"SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THE STATE OF DENMARK"

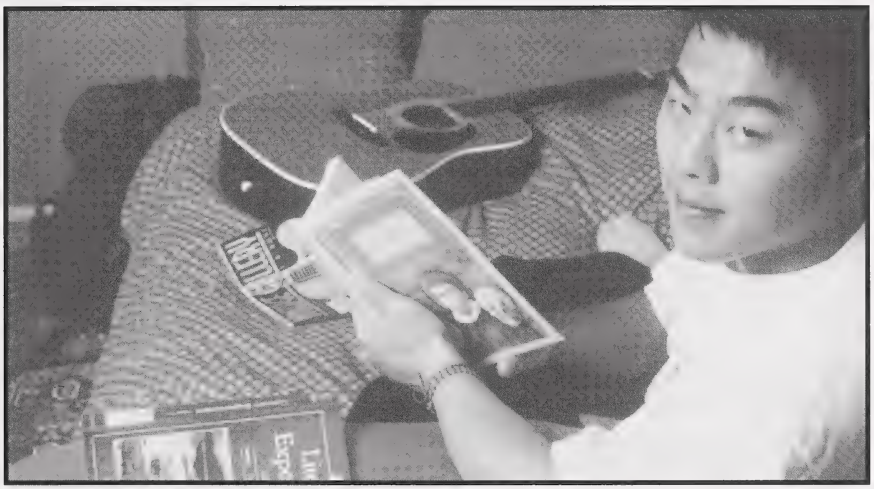


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How would you feel if

- your father, whom you idolize, suddenly dies and within a month your mother remarries?
- you are betrayed by someone you greatly trusted? You don't know to whom you can turn because everyone close to you seems to be lying.
- a friend suddenly turns cold, won't answer your calls, and won't tell you why?
- someone you love gives you back all your gifts and no longer wants to see you?
- you're very upset with someone, and before long two of your good friends show up and ask how you're doing? You begin to tell them honestly until you realize that they've been sent as spies by the person with whom you're upset.

It might be hard to imagine how you'd cope with any one of these situations, but Hamlet finds himself in all of them. It's his reaction to these events that create the essence of the play.

In this section you'll be introduced to the play *Hamlet* and you'll also begin your reading of the first act. As well, you'll examine the Elizabethan worldview and the relevance it has to your study of *Hamlet*. You'll be able to demonstrate your understanding of Act 1 of the play in your Section 1 Assignment.

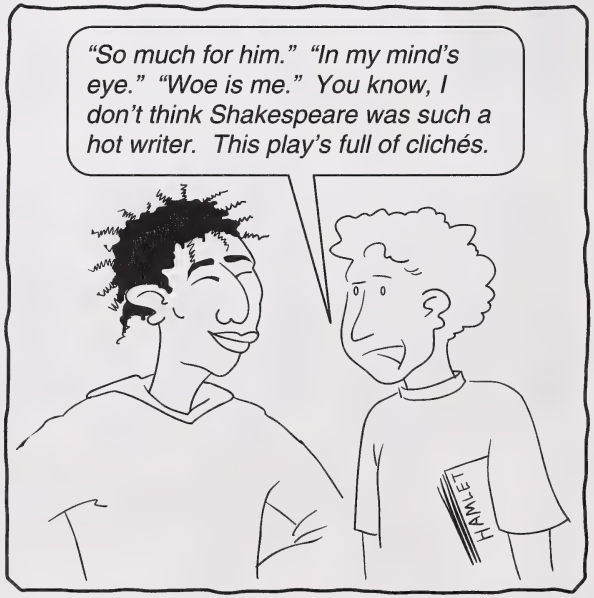
Activity 1: Background to *Hamlet*



Do you recognize any of the following lines?

- "I must be cruel, only to be kind:"
- "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."
- "The play's the thing"
- "[Every] dog will have his day."
- "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."
- "To be, or not to be: that is the question:"
- "And I am sick at heart."
- "Not a mouse stirring."
- "So much for him."
- "Frailty, thy name is woman!"
- "In my mind's eye,"
- "to thine own self be true,"
- "to the manner born"
- "Unhand me,"
- "In my heart of heart[s],"
- "Brevity is the soul of wit."
- "What a piece of work is a man!"
- "O! woe is me,"
- "Suit the action to the work,"
- "To hold… the mirror up to nature;"
- "The lady doth protest too much,"
- "Tis now the very witching time of night,"
- "A king of shreds and patches."
- "Sweets to the sweet:"
- "The rest is silence."

All of these quotations are taken from *Hamlet* and all of them (and many more) have found their way into modern speech although perhaps in some modified form. Many have become clichés. *Hamlet* is a play that has many famous lines. Perhaps the best known is "To be, or not to be: that is the question." You've probably quoted *Hamlet* many times without even knowing it!



The Origins of *Hamlet*

Hamlet was likely written between 1599 and 1602; the exact date is unknown as accurate records weren't kept. It was first published as a quarto (a single play) in 1603.

As with many of Shakespeare's plays, the storyline for *Hamlet* isn't an original one. The earliest reference to Hamlet comes from a Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, in his book *Historia Danica*, written in the twelfth century. In the original, Prince Amleth's father, King Fengo, was murdered by his brother. This story was retold in 1576 by a Frenchman, Belleforest, in his *Histories Tragiques*. It's likely that Shakespeare used the translation of this work as the basis for his *Hamlet.*

Hamlet is an example of one of the most popular sub-genres of Elizabethan drama – the revenge tragedy. This means that *Hamlet* contains some of the standard conventions of this tradition. In this tradition, a ghost or some supernatural being typically appears, prompting the hero to action – to avenge the murder of a person, usually of high status in society. Also in this tradition, the hero feigns madness in order to escape detection. Typically, there's a delay in the accomplishment of revenge, either because of doubt on the part of the avenger or because the avenger cannot find a suitable occasion to carry out this task. One of the most famous plays of the sixteenth century, *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd, is a revenge play. All of these conventions appear in *Hamlet* including the device of the "play within a play," which Kyd had formerly used to help his hero obtain blood justice.

Melodrama: an exaggerated, formula-written drama, usually full of blood and gore, intended only for its emotional impact

With just these bare facts in mind, and the realization that the plot of *Hamlet* is little more than a series of incidents eventually leading up to the slaughter of all its principal characters, including the hero, one might be inclined to call the play nothing more than a conventional **melodrama**. Nevertheless, although Shakespeare wrote in the "revenge" tradition, and although the skeletal plot comes from someone else, *Hamlet* is an original work of art. The play is far more than a revenge play, and more than a retelling of an old Norse story.

Hamlet is a play about the pursuit of revenge and, more significantly, about the pursuit of truth.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following idea.

With a partner, if possible, brainstorm the names of television shows or movies that use revenge as the key component to the plot. For example, in the film *Ghost,* actor Patrick Swayze returns as a ghost to track down his own killer and to protect his girlfriend.



Overview of *Hamlet*



Gurtek: I assume that if *Hamlet* were written in the "revenge tradition," the play must be about Hamlet getting even with someone, right?

Ms. Jensen: Quite right. Let me give you some background before you begin to read the play in Activity 2. Hamlet is the prince of Denmark, the son of the recently deceased King Hamlet and his wife Queen Gertrude. He's also the nephew of Claudius, Hamlet Sr.'s brother.

Marie: All right, let me get this straight. Hamlet's father's name is also Hamlet? And he's dead?

Ms. Jensen: Correct. He died a couple of months before the play begins while sleeping one afternoon in his garden. Since he didn't have any wounds, it was assumed that a snake had bitten him.

Marie: I don't buy that story; it sounds a little fishy. Anyway, tell me what this Hamlet guy's like. Does he become the next king?

Ms. Jensen: Hamlet's a young man in his twenties. He's known to be athletic and quite an intellectual; he's currently studying at the University of Wittenberg in Germany. He's returned home for his father's funeral because he loved his father very deeply. But guess what? In the meantime, his mother has married his Uncle Claudius! And that's not all; in Hamlet's absence, Claudius has been selected as the next king.

Rico: Oh – oh. I guess you might say "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!"

Ms. Jensen: Precisely! Anyway, the Hamlet we meet as the play opens isn't the "normal" Hamlet. He's grief-stricken over his father's death, and perhaps he feels even more dejected by his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle.

Marie: Now this is getting juicy.

Ms. Jensen: The play begins on an ominous note. A ghost that resembles Hamlet Sr. appears at midnight to the sentries at the castle of Elsinore, where the royal family lives. The sentries (who are just a little shaken up by all this) have brought Horatio, Hamlet's closest friend and confidant, to observe the ghost to verify what they've seen.

The Principal Characters

There are three main families in *Hamlet,* the members of which come into contact and conflict at various points. In addition, each family has a member who seeks revenge. Read over the following character sketches to get an idea of the family connections. You may wish to refer back to these charts later to clarify relationships.

Family #1: "The Hamlet Clan"



King Hamlet

- former King of Denmark
- recently deceased (under suspicious circumstances)
- much loved by his kingdom and especially by Hamlet Jr., who often praises his deceased father



Gertrude

- a weak but affectionate character
- marries Claudius as soon as her first husband is buried
- may have been having an affair with Claudius before her husband's death

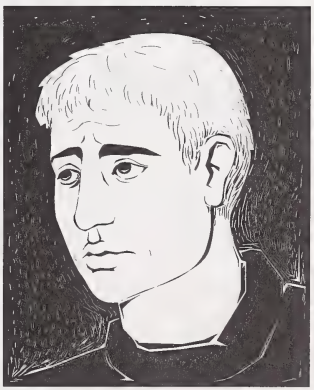


Claudius

- Hamlet Sr.'s brother and recently crowned King of Denmark
- Hamlet Jr.'s new "uncle-father"

Prince Hamlet

- an introspective courtier, scholar, and soldier who is in a profound melancholy due to the recent death of his father and hasty marriage of his mother to a man he despises – his uncle!



Prince Hamlet

Family #2: "The Polonius Clan"

Polonius

- the Lord Chamberlain and friend of Claudius
- a strict father who tends to meddle in the affairs of others



Polonius



Ophelia

- a lovely young woman who loves Hamlet
- a dutiful daughter who is obedient to her father



Laertes

- an active, impetuous, and rather wild young man
- a man devoted to his father and sister

Family #3: "The Fortinbras Clan"

King Fortinbras

- former King of Norway
- killed by Hamlet Sr. some twenty-five years before the play begins

↓

Fortinbras

- a gallant young prince from Norway who is determined to win back the land lost by his father in a duel against Hamlet Sr. twenty-five years before the play begins

Old Norway

- brother to Fortinbras Sr.
- current King of Norway
- a sickly man who is ignorant of the plans of his nephew, Fortinbras Jr.

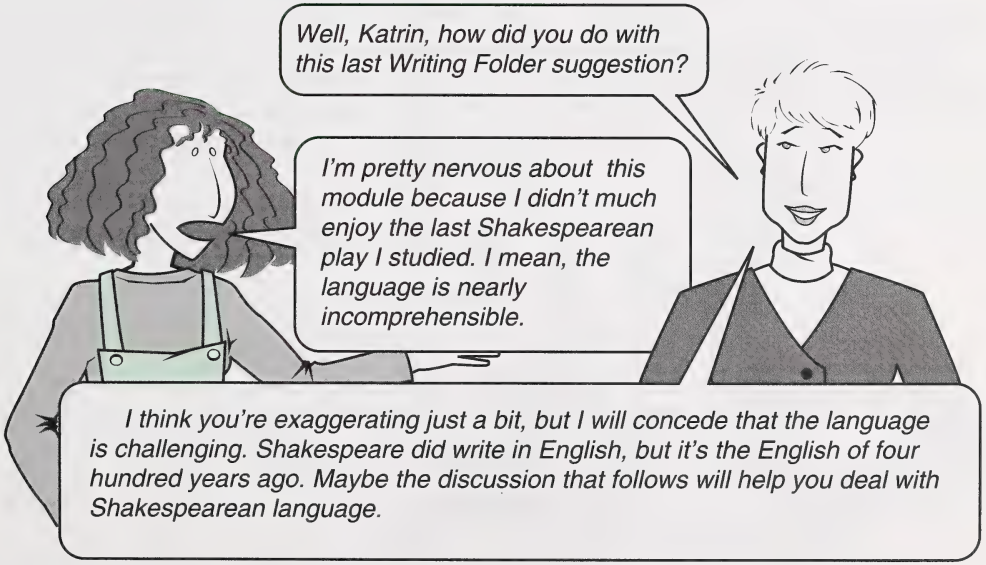
Sundry Important Characters, Unrelated by Family	
Horatio	**Rosencrantz and Guildenstern**
• Hamlet's loyal friend • a scholar who is praised by Hamlet for his even-tempered disposition	• Hamlet's childhood friends • eager to win the favour of King Claudius

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following idea.

Some students are a little apprehensive when they commence a Shakespearean play. Perhaps their first experiences with Shakespeare weren't positive, or perhaps they're concerned about the "antiquated" language being a barrier to enjoying or understanding the play. Other students may be quite excited about studying a classic and looking forward to the challenges ahead. Where do you fall in this range of initial reactions to studying Shakespeare? Explore your feelings about studying *Hamlet.*

Coping With Shakespearean Language



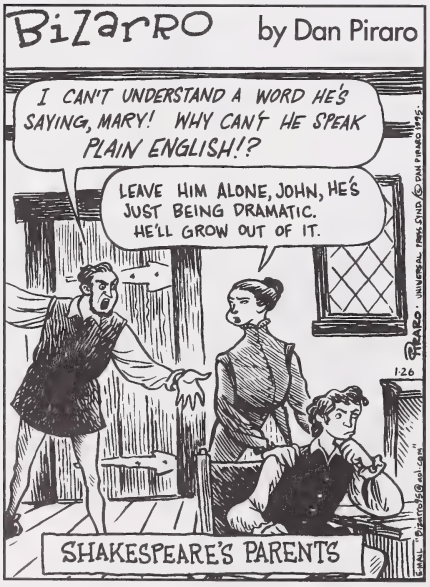
The fact is that many students, like Katrin, have difficulty with Shakespeare. Usually vocabulary is the biggest problem. In his plays Shakespeare employs a vocabulary of approximately twenty thousand words (some people, using a different method of determining such things, put the figure considerably higher). The average well-educated person today is thought to have an active vocabulary of about four thousand words, and the entire King James version of the Bible has only eight thousand! No wonder students often think of "Shakespeare" as another language! As well, Shakespeare was a poet-dramatist. Often the speeches were written in **blank verse** that uses a wide variety of figures of speech and frequent allusions to classical literature.

Blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter

Obviously if you can't understand what's being said, you won't appreciate what's going on in the play. In most editions of Shakespearean plays there's a glossary at the bottom or side of each page or at the back of the book. Some editions have short discussions or synopses of each scene as well. Make sure you look up any difficult words as you're reading. It would be a good idea to keep a dictionary close at hand.

In addition, context clues help tremendously as you read Shakespeare. If you concentrate as you read and assume that what you're reading will make sense, usually it will. You'll be able to fill in many of the blanks from the meanings of words you do understand. If you do this and use your glossary faithfully, things should work out.

Katrin is right up to a point. The language of Shakespeare is challenging, but it's not impossible if you're prepared to meet the playwright halfway; and it does become much more natural as you get used to it. Once you've broken through the barrier of words, you should find that the action of *Hamlet* will become much clearer than you might have originally thought it would.



As in other modules of this course, you'll be given suggestions for Writing Folder pieces as you work through *Hamlet.* Some students, however, find that it helps them when reading Shakespeare to keep a separate journal. Such a journal can take any one of a number of forms; here are a few possibilities:

- a response journal in which you anticipate action and respond to the various scenes
- a personal journal in which you take the role of Hamlet, revealing his thoughts about the events of each scene
- a learning journal in which you reflect on your learning and monitor your own understanding of the play

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- a dialectic journal in which you write letters to another student (if you're in a class or have a study partner) about what's happening in the play
- a personal journal in the role of Horatio (a character you'll soon encounter) shaped by his involvement with events
- a critical-response journal in which you record your observations of patterns in the play

If you think that keeping a journal would help you in your study of *Hamlet,* by all means keep one. Writing down your ideas, perceptions, and reflections is one of the best ways there is to focus your thoughts and maximize your learning.

Reading *Hamlet*

> … so shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,

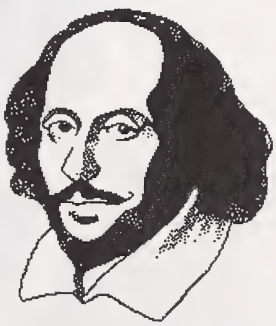
So says Horatio to Fortinbras near the end of the play. This brief excerpt highlights some of the more dramatic aspects of *Hamlet.* No less than five murders, two accidental killings, and one suicide occur during the play! In addition, there are two deaths occurring before the play begins that have a significant bearing on the plot. The carnage rivals that of an Arnold Schwarzenegger film! As well, Shakespeare has included a ghost, a mad woman, an escape from pirates, and a sword fight in the play. This all adds up to a rather exciting story. So, if you think Shakespeare is boring, think again.

Throughout this module all quotations and references to specific scenes and lines are taken from the recommended text, the HBJ Shakespeare edition of *Hamlet* published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Canada. It isn't necessary that you use this edition; however, there may be some minor discrepancies between quotations in the module and your edition if you choose a different one. Whatever edition you use, you'll find that a few line-number references are only approximate.

Other Ways of Experiencing *Hamlet*

Closet dramas: plays meant to be read rather than performed

It's important to remember that Shakespeare's plays were not **closet dramas**; they were intended to be performed in front of a live audience. Consequently, a silent reading of the play doesn't do it justice, and you'd probably benefit greatly from additional methods for experiencing the play. Here are a few you might consider:



Audio



Many students find it useful to supplement their reading of the text with an audiotape production of *Hamlet.* They find doing this improves their comprehension while bringing the play to life. Most high schools and public libraries carry audiocassettes of Shakespeare's major plays.

If an audio version of *Hamlet* is available to you and you choose not to listen to the entire play, at least try to listen to Hamlet's soliloquies when you encounter them in your reading. Hearing Shakespeare brings it to life – and makes it much easier to understand.

If you do intend to listen to the play – and it's strongly recommended that you do – probably the best approach is to listen to each scene as you study it and then listen to the whole thing when you're finished. However, different students have different learning styles; so ultimately it's up to you how you make use of any audio resources at your disposal.

Video

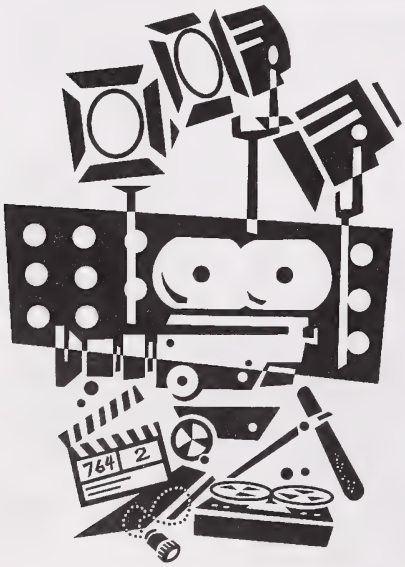


There are several excellent film productions of *Hamlet* available.

The BBC Television Shakespeare production is very close textually to the original. This may be available at your local high school. In 1990 Mel Gibson gave a fine performance as Hamlet. This production, however, takes liberties with the original play; many lines – and even some characters – are omitted from the original. It does have the advantage, however, of having a modern, up-to-date tone and style; and it should be available at many videotape outlets.

Of course many purists would still call Sir Laurence Olivier's 1948 movie the standard by which all other *Hamlets* must be compared. This film won Oscars for best picture and best actor as well as for art direction, set decoration, and costumes. It should still be available at larger videotape outlets.

As well as feature-length films, there are shorter videotapes available on *Hamlet* that deal with aspects of the play in a variety of creative ways.



One treatment of this sort, a twenty-four minute film showing a rehearsal of some of Hamlet's soliloquies – and starring Shakespeare himself, along with the most famous of Elizabethan actors, Richared Burbage – is *The Tragedie of Hamlet*. This video, part of the *Shakespeare in Rehearsal* series, is available from the ACCESS Network.

Another short treatment of *Hamlet* is a thirty-six minute Canadian-made video produced by the Eugenia Educational Foundation as part of its *School for Shakespeare* series. Titled simply *Hamlet,* this excellent production will give you a clear overview of the play presented in an unpretentious, easy-to-understand, and entertaining manner. It's distributed by McNabb & Connolly, and may be available at your local high school.

Whatever film version of *Hamlet* you choose, it will breathe life into the printed page for you. How you use it is again best left up to you, but if possible try to watch it at least twice – at different stages of your study of the play.

Stage Production



Ideally, you should experience the play as it was intended – on stage. If you're fortunate enough to have the opportunity to see the play in a theatre, by all means go; you won't regret it.

But now you're ready to begin reading the play. As Hamlet himself says, "… the readiness is all."

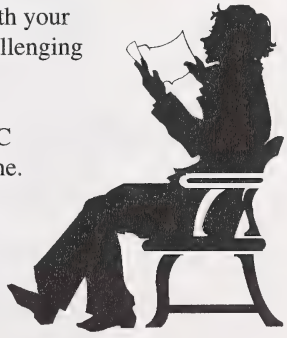
Activity 2: Act 1, Scene 1 – "This Dreaded Sight"

Reading the Play



Now it's time to begin reading *Hamlet.* In this activity you'll read Act 1, Scene 1. At this point you should establish a clear strategy for reading the play. Here's one method:

Do the work in the activity until you're directed to read some part of the play. In your Module Booklet you'll be given a short synopsis of what you're about to read. If you have an audiotape of the play, you may wish to listen to it along with your first reading. Stop the tape frequently to review the glossary of challenging vocabulary in your text.



If you have a film version that's faithful to the text, such as the BBC *Hamlet,* you might wish to watch it act by act or even scene by scene. This way you'll get yet another opportunity to see and hear the play. And remember, each time you review the text, you'll become that much more comfortable with Elizabethan language.

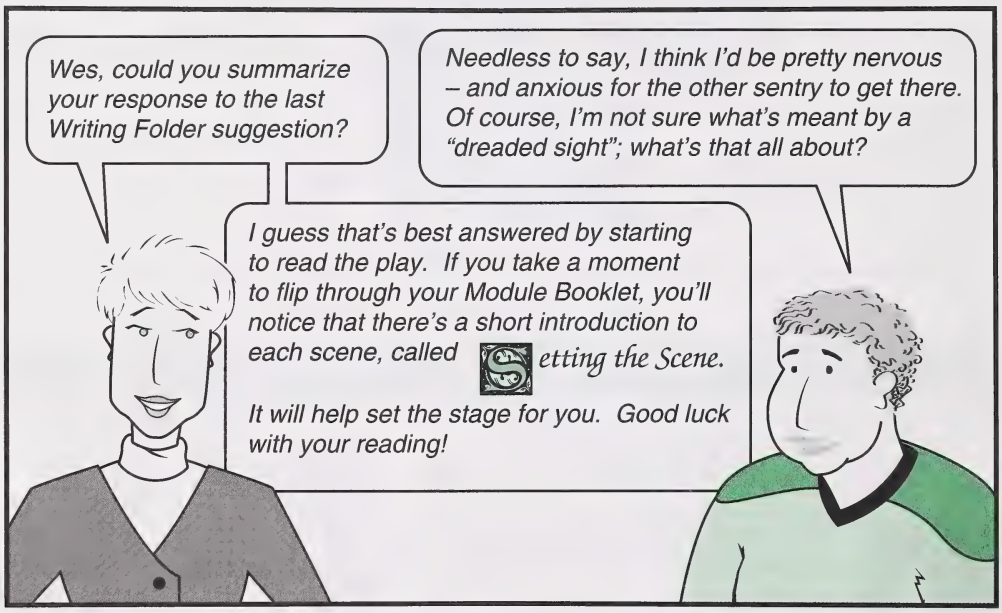
As Hamlet says, "And now I'll do't."

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:

Imagine that it's midnight, the night is pitch black, the air is chilly and slightly foggy, and you're a guard on the top of the parapets at Elsinore castle. You're alone. Couple this with the fact that for the last two nights a "dreaded sight" has appeared before you. In a couple of minutes you expect your friend Bernardo to relieve you. How do you feel at this particular moment? What thoughts are racing through your head? What would your emotional state be?





Setting the Scene

It's been a couple of months since the death of King Hamlet. Very recently, Claudius and Gertrude were married and Claudius was crowned king. Hamlet has returned for the funeral of his father, and ironically, for his mother's wedding. Now, just after all this has happened, a ghost that resembles the late King Hamlet has been seen by the guards stalking around the ramparts at midnight. The captain of the guards, Marcellus, who is unsure about how to deal with this supernatural visitation, has called upon Horatio to accompany them this night to verify what they've seen. The play begins at this point.

It's midnight and the watch is about to be changed. The guards are uneasy but Horatio is calm because he's skeptical about the "dreaded sight" he's been told about. However, the Ghost appears but refuses to speak to them even though Horatio tries to make contact. Horatio decides at the end of the scene that Hamlet must hear this news as soon as possible.



Now read Scene 1 as far as line 40; then respond to the following questions.

1. Explain the significance of Bernardo's being the first to challenge Francisco rather than vice versa. What mood does this establish? (In arriving at your answer, consider the setting, the atmosphere created, the emotional state of the characters, and the curiosity aroused by the mention of "this dreaded sight.")

2. What is Horatio's attitude at this point? Quote a line or lines from the play to support your answer.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.



So how's it going so far?

Better than I thought it would. I'm glad I got a copy of the audiotape. It really helps set the atmosphere; it also helps me understand what's going on.





Same with me. But I've got a couple of questions. Why does Francisco say on line 8 that he's "sick at heart"? And, why is Horatio so reluctant to believe the story of the guards?

Both good questions. The reason that Francisco is perturbed isn't immediately obvious. It does indicate, however, that something is dreadfully wrong. As for Horatio, he's a scholar and likely to greet any supernatural phenomenon with skepticism. This time, however, he couldn't be more wrong.



Now finish reading to the end of Scene 1; then answer the following questions.

3. Why is Horatio urged by Marcellus to speak to the Ghost?

4. In lines 70 to 79 Marcellus talks of the state of the kingdom. What does he reveal is going on in Denmark?

5. Although Marcellus is well aware of the preparations for war, he's ignorant of the reasons behind them. In lines 80 to 107 Horatio answers Marcellus's question, "Who is't that can inform me?" by presenting the facts of the antecedent action. Briefly summarize these facts.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.

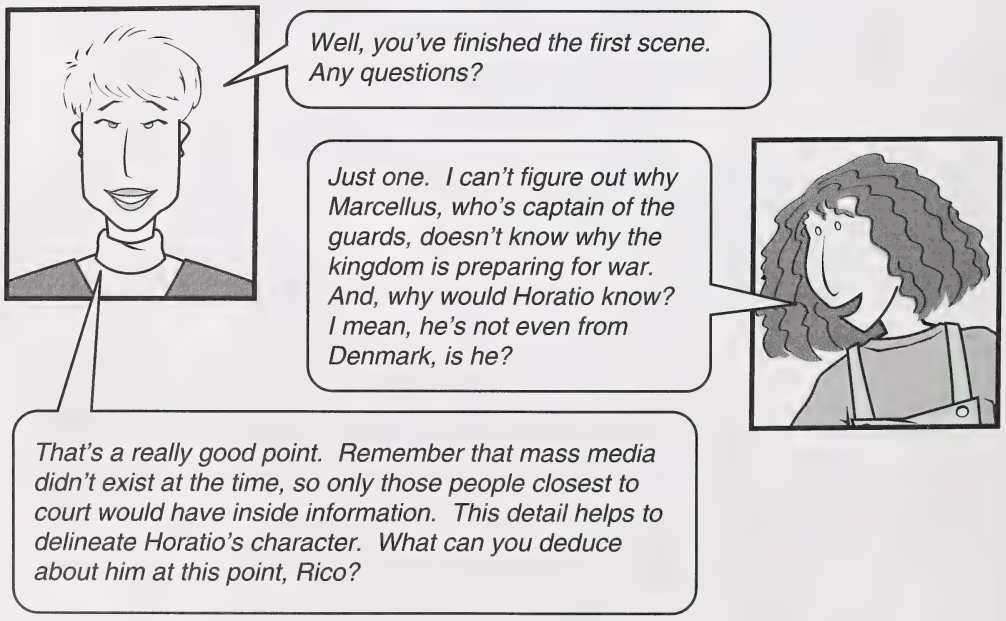
Scene 1 ends by preparing the audience for Hamlet's appearance. In his last speech, Horatio reveals that he's anxious to share with Hamlet what he, Marcellus, and Bernardo have just experienced. He believes that the Ghost will communicate with Hamlet alone. Marcellus reveals that he knows where he may be found. The audience eagerly awaits Hamlet's reaction to this news.

Did you notice any evidence in this scene as to the superstitious nature of Shakespeare's audience? The fact is that Elizabethans were superstitious people. A close examination of Horatio's and Marcellus's speeches provide many examples. Here are a few of them:

- Horatio tells of the dire warnings that befell Rome before the assassination of Julius Caesar. Apparently the dead came out of their tombs to shriek in the streets. The appearance of the Ghost is viewed as an omen of calamities.

- Later Horatio tells the guards that spirits may walk the earth only at night and must with the break of day return to their homes.

- Marcellus adds that Christmastime is so holy that the cock crows all night long, no spirits roam, and witches cannot cast spells.





6. Now you go ahead and fill in the blanks for Sue. How would you rate this scene?

Did you notice how carefully Shakespeare incorporates foreshadowing into the opening scene of the play? An example of this occurs in line 69 when Horatio says, "This bodes some strange eruption to our state." At this point Horatio tells you that Hamlet's world is about to be turned upside down.

7. Can you find any other examples of foreshadowing that suggest the volatility of the political situation in Denmark?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.

Motifs

Corruption ("Something Is Rotten in the State of Denmark")

Motif: a recurring idea, image, or phrase that acts as a unifying device in a work of literature



A **motif** is a recurring theme or image in a work of literature. For example, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, blood is mentioned numerous times throughout the play. Eventually the audience associates blood with Macbeth's feelings of guilt for having murdered King Duncan. The fact that this image recurs is proof that it's significant.

Corruption is a key motif in *Hamlet.* Throughout the play there's the underlying current of realization that all isn't well in Hamlet's world. This motif is probably best summed up in Marcellus's famous line "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Act 1, Scene 4, line 90).

In this context the very first line of the play – "Who's there?" – is significant. As you've noticed, it's Bernardo, the relieving guard, not Francisco, the current sentry, who poses this question. Why is Bernardo so fearful? So you see that the very first line of the play tells you that something's not quite right in this kingdom.

8. Take a few minutes and carefully reexamine Scene 1 to identify other phrases or situations that support this motif.

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 2.

You'll be doing more work on this and other motifs as you read through the play. If it seems a bit unclear now, don't worry; you'll soon get the knack of it.

Activity 3: Act 1, Scene 2 – "I Doubt Some Foul Play"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

Scene 1 ends with the promise that you'll soon meet Prince Hamlet and that the Ghost is likely to impart his message to him. In stark contrast with the gloomy, foreboding atmosphere of the opening scene, Scene 2 begins the following morning with all the flourish, colour, and pageantry you might expect at a king's court.



Claudius, the newly crowned King of Denmark, begins the scene with a speech to the court. Read the opening speech (lines 1 to 39) carefully; then respond to the following Writing Folder suggestion.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following idea.

It's generally felt that this speech is probably Claudius' first major address to his court. He'd obviously wish to make a good impression on his subjects. What impression does Claudius make on you?

Compare your ideas with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 3.

Now answer the following questions about Claudius's speech.

1. In his opening speech, Claudius deals with three matters of state. What are they?

2. What evidence is there that the court has approved of Claudius's marriage to Gertrude?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 3.



Personally, I kind of like this Claudius; he's diplomatic but forceful. I'm impressed by the fact that he's trying to prevent a war.



That's true. He is decisive, which is an admirable trait. Let's look at what happens now. You're about to meet Laertes for the first time. Remember, he's the son of Polonius, Claudius's right-hand man. He's about the same age as Hamlet, and he, too, has come from afar to attend Claudius's coronation. He now approaches the King with a request for leave to return to France. Hamlet will seek permission to return to the University of Wittenberg.



With all these similarities, I suspect you want us to compare these two characters.

Right. Hamlet and Laertes are character foils. Throughout the play they'll find themselves in parallel situations; however, they react quite differently. You'll be invited to compare their reactions and to make inferences about their characters based on those differences.





All right. Let's get reading.

In just a minute. Now, as you'll see, Hamlet's first speech is an ***aside****, which is a short speech audible to the audience but not normally heard by the other actors on stage. Think carefully about what Hamlet says to his new stepfather and his mother. Try to imagine the tone of his voice.*

Aside: a short speech in a play that is heard only by the audience, not other characters

Now read lines 40 to 128; then respond to the questions that follow.

3. Explain the meaning and significance of Hamlet's opening lines: "A little more than kin, and less than kind" and "I am too much i' the sun" (lines 65 and 67).

4. Hamlet becomes particularly annoyed when his mother asks, "Why seems it so particular with thee?" (line 75). Why?

5. Claudius describes Hamlet's grief over his father's death as "impious stubbornness" (line 94). Is it? Explain.

6. In the end Hamlet acquiesces and agrees to remain at Elsinore. He says, "I shall in all my best obey you, madam" (line 120). Claudius answers that this is "a loving and a fair reply" (line 121). Is it? Explain.

7. Lines 125 to 128 reveal another side of Claudius. What do you learn about him in his speeches?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 3.



You know, one thing puzzles me. Why would Claudius want Hamlet to remain at Elsinore? You'd think he'd be happy to be rid of him.

I suppose Claudius figures it would be easier to keep an eye on Hamlet if he were close at hand. But tell me, from what little you've seen of Hamlet so far, what do you think of him?





I feel sorry for the guy. I mean, his father dies and nobody seems to care. His mother marries her brother-in-law in record time. It sort of makes you think they must have been an item before King Hamlet died. No wonder Hamlet is depressed.

Good points, Aaron. Hamlet's words are very bitter – and restrained. He speaks under his breath because there seems to be no one he can trust. Everyone supports Claudius. Now it's time to read the first of Hamlet's ***soliloquies****. Do you remember what a soliloquy is?*



Soliloquy: a speech given by a character alone on stage in order to reveal his or her thoughts and feelings

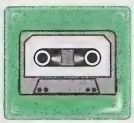


Isn't it a speech that actors give when they're alone on stage?

Good for you. The word soliloquy *comes from the Latin* solus, *which means* alone *– as in the word* solo. *And loqui is from the Latin verb meaning* to speak. *Do you know the word* loquacious*? It means talkative. You could say I'm loquacious. Anyway, a soliloquy is important because it gives the actor a chance to reveal his inner thoughts to the audience. Normally this is done through dialogue, but this route is closed to Hamlet because he doesn't have many people he can trust.*



Now read Hamlet's soliloquy – lines 129 to 159. If you have access to an audio or video version of *Hamlet*, you might wish to locate Hamlet's soliloquy from this scene and listen to a professional Shakespearean actor deliver it – either while you read it or after you've finished (or both). It will bring the soliloquy to life for you.





Once you've read the soliloquy – preferably more than once – respond to the questions that follow.

8. What is Hamlet wishing for in lines 129 and 130?

9. a. Hamlet is particularly harsh on his mother in this speech. Why?

   b. In your opinion is he justified?

10. Hamlet closes his soliloquy by stating that he must hold his tongue. Why is that?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 3.



etting the Scene

Hamlet's soliloquy is interrupted by his good friend Horatio and the guards. They share with an excited Hamlet the news of the Ghost. Notice that Hamlet greets Horatio warmly like the good friend he is. He greets Marcellus by name, however, somewhat more formally. He's polite with Bernardo, but he doesn't know his name ("Good even, sir."). Remember, the closer Hamlet is to each character, the higher that character's social status is.



Now read the rest of Scene 2 and respond to the questions that follow.

11. Explain what Hamlet means when he says on lines 179 and 180 "…the funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth marriage tables."

12. Describe Hamlet's reaction to the news of his father's Ghost.

13. a. Explain the meaning of the last four lines of the scene.

    b. What foreshadowing is embedded there?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 3.

Motifs

Corruption



In Scene 2 the motif of corruption is further reinforced. The court's support for the false pretender, Claudius, over the rightful heir, Hamlet, is an example.

14. Can you come up with any other examples that reinforce this motif?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 3.

Appearance and Reality



Another key motif introduced in Scene 2 is the discrepancy between appearance and reality. What appears to be may not be. Claudius appears to be a good king, but is he? Denmark appears to be in order, but is it? Hamlet expounds on this subject when he talks about his "inky cloak": "... these indeed seem / For they are actions that a man might play" (lines 83 and 84). He tells us that people can play many roles. Anyone can pretend to be sad by looking dejected and shedding a tear or two. Hamlet refers to his behaviour and dress as "the trappings and the suits of woe" (line 86). He's advising us to look beyond the superficial to see what lies beneath.

Activity 4: Act 1, Scene 3 – "To Thine Own Self Be True"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

Scene 3 focuses on Polonius and his family. Laertes, about to embark on his trip back to France, begins the scene by offering some brotherly advice to Ophelia regarding her blossoming relationship with the Lord Hamlet. Before Laertes leaves, Polonius will offer some fatherly advice to his son about how he should behave in France. After Laertes leaves, Polonius returns to the topic of the romance between Ophelia and Hamlet. Polonius takes a much grimmer view of the relationship than does Laertes.



Now read Scene 3. Then respond to the Writing Folder suggestion that follows.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following ideas.

Imagine what Laertes is doing while listening to his father's speech. What is he thinking? What kind of expression would he have on his face? Would he be paying close attention, or might he be thinking "Oh no, here comes that lecture again"? (He might even be exchanging a wink with his sister as if they were sharing an inside joke.) Imagine now that you're directing this scene. How would you instruct the actor playing Laertes to play his part?



Now respond to the questions that follow.

1. What advice does Laertes give Ophelia?

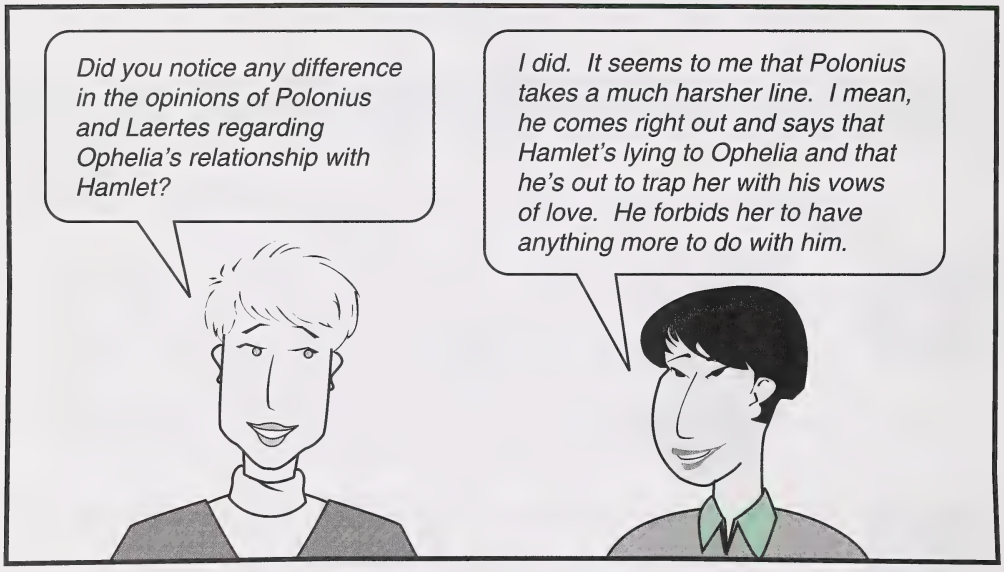
2. How does Ophelia respond?

3. Polonius's speech to Laertes is full of advice. What does he say about each of the following?

   a. friendship
   b. quarrelling
   c. conversation
   d. dress
   e. borrowing and lending

4. Polonius seems to be giving good advice. Is he really? In your response consider who benefits from the advice.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 4.



WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder describe your impressions of Polonius. Is he a loving father out to safeguard Ophelia, is he an overbearing, controlling tyrant, or is he …?

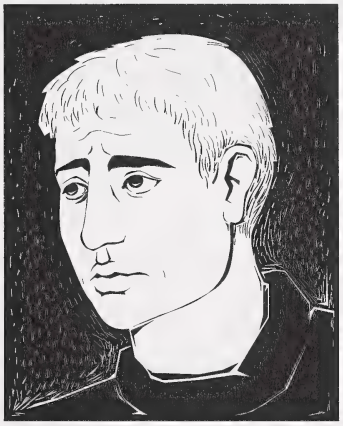
Character Foils



The scene you've just read also allows for further comparisons and contrasts between Hamlet and Laertes, who are, as you'll recall character foils. Both men, you no doubt noted, love their fathers; but do they have the same degree of respect for them? In his soliloquy, it's clearly evident that Hamlet idolized his father. He compares him to Hyperion, the Greek sun-god. Laertes, by contrast, is impatient to leave and has little to say in response to Polonius's advice.

And while both young men want to leave Denmark, their respective destinations have a good deal to say about their characters. Hamlet wants to return to the University of Wittenberg. This choice emphasizes Hamlet's intellectualism. But Laertes is headed to France, which is appealing for the social life it offers. Remember that Claudius tells him, "Take thy fair hour," which means enjoy yourself while you're young. Laertes is clearly portrayed as more self-indulgent and carefree than Hamlet.





Motifs

Corruption



Polonius suggests in this scene that Hamlet is trying to corrupt Ophelia; yet the evidence provided thus far in the play doesn't seem to justify this accusation. Ophelia explains that Hamlet has courted her in "honourable fashion." If you don't accept Polonius's assessment of Hamlet's character, then you must ask why Polonius is so critical. It appears that perhaps Polonius is judging Hamlet by his own standards rather than Hamlet's. Polonius may remember his own wanton youth and is likely assuming that Hamlet must be the same sort of young man. This scene hints at Polonius's corrupt nature.

Appearance and Reality



This motif is closely linked with the preceding one. You must look beyond the surface to get a really good glimpse of a person's character. Is Hamlet a cruel seducer of a young woman, or is he an honourable suitor? Is Polonius a kindly father who's protecting his children, or is he a suspicious man who's ruining his daughter's chance at happiness?

Activity 5: Act 1, Scenes 4 and 5 – "The Time Is Out of Joint"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

It's been twenty-four hours since the beginning of Act 1, and Hamlet is eagerly awaiting the reappearance of his father's ghost. The noise of Claudius's party forms the backdrop of Scene 4. The scene closes with Hamlet following the Ghost into the evening mist.



Now read Scene 4 in its entirety; then respond to the following questions.

1. Reread lines 13 to 22.

   a. How does Hamlet feel about the Danes' reputation as heavy drinkers?

   b. To what other thoughts does this lead Hamlet in the rest of the scene?

2. Horatio tries to dissuade Hamlet from following the Ghost. He's worried that the Ghost might tempt Hamlet toward the ocean or the the cliff overlooking the sea. There the Ghost might take on some horrible form that would drive Hamlet mad. But Hamlet is resolute about speaking to the Ghost. What threat does he make against his friends if they try to impede him?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 5.

Note that it's near the end of this scene that Marcellus utters the famous line, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Marcellus, like Hamlet, knows that all isn't well. The Ghost's appearance is an ill omen.





Hamlet

Setting the Scene

Scene 5 follows quickly on the heels of Scene 4. Hamlet has slipped away with the Ghost, who finally reveals what's troubling his soul. What do you think the Ghost will tell Hamlet?

Hamlet

Now read Scene 5 in its entirety and respond to the following questions.



3. a. What charge does the Ghost lay on Hamlet?

   b. What is the prince's first reaction to the charge?

4. In this scene the Ghost reveals that though his death had been believed to be accidental ("'Tis given out that, sleeping in mine orchard, / A serpent stung me;" – lines 35 and 36), in fact he had been murdered by Claudius, who poured a poison (hebenon) into his ear. Hamlet reacts by exclaiming "O my prophetic soul!" (line 42). What does he mean when he says this?

5. The King charges his son with the revenge of his murder. However, he does impose a couple of limitations. What limits does he put on Hamlet? (Hint: Reread lines 85 to 89.)

6. How does Hamlet in his words and behaviour show the state into which he's been thrown by the news of his father's murder?

7. Hamlet initially urged the ghost of his father to tell him quickly who the murderer is so "with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love, / [Hamlet] May sweep to [his] revenge" (lines 29 to 31). Yet by the end of the scene, Hamlet is telling Horatio and the guards that he plans to act mad – "To put an antic disposition on" (line 173). Why can't Hamlet immediately sweep to his revenge?

8. Explain the meaning of these lines from Hamlet's final speech of this scene:

> The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right! –

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 5.



Boy, that was quite a dramatic finish to the opening Act! I thought the Ghost's speech was particularly cool, especially when he was talking about the pain he was suffering. Where exactly is he supposed to be? In hell?

Strictly speaking he's in purgatory. Some Christians believe that if a soul isn't good enough to go directly to heaven nor bad enough to go to hell, it'll lodge in purgatory for a period of time while its sins are purged away.





So when the Ghost says in line 77 he was "Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin," he means that he's now suffering because of his sins?

Correct. He explains that he was "Unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled." This means he didn't have a chance to ask for God's forgiveness before he died. So, not only was he murdered, but he was also made to suffer in the afterlife.



No wonder he wants revenge. Anyway, I've got another question. What's Hamlet talking about when he says in line 100 that he'll "wipe away all trivial fond records"?

At this point Hamlet is very distraught. He's afraid he'll forget what the Ghost has just asked him to do. Perhaps in a day or so it will all seem a bad dream. That's why he feels the need to write down what's happened in his notebook: "– meet it is I set it down." So Hamlet decides that he must remove from his mind everything that occupies his thinking so he can focus completely on vengeance.



Note that in Shakespeare's day it was a habit of scholars to keep notebooks on their persons in which they recorded inspirations and poetic lines (does this bring back Joan Didion's essay "On Keeping a Notebook"?). Hamlet is saying that he'll set down in his notebook his one thought – revenge – and delete everything else.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:

Hamlet tells us that he's going to focus on avenging his father's murder and that he'll act mad. What effect do you think this will have on people at court and on Hamlet's family? What do you predict will happen in the next act?

Motifs

Poison



Closely connected to the motif of rottenness is the idea of poison. Poison appears literally and figuratively throughout the play. On the literal level, the Ghost describes how Claudius poisons him. He even refers to Claudius as a serpent. On another level, all of Denmark is poisoned by Claudius's actions.

9. Another example of poison occurs when the Ghost tells Hamlet, "Taint not thy mind" (line 86). What does he mean by this?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 5.

Appearance and Reality



Scene 5 dramatically strips away the innocuous masks covering Claudius and Gertrude. The Ghost refers to Gertrude as his "seeming-virtuous queen" (line 47). Hamlet describes Claudius as a "smiling, damned villain" (line 107). By the end of the scene, Hamlet, whose face hitherto has been the mirror of his soul, will now play his own role: he will act mad. Interestingly, Hamlet describes himself as a "distracted globe" (line 98) and Horatio had warned him before he saw the ghost that he might go mad. Will he?

Activity 6: The Elizabethan Worldview



WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following idea.

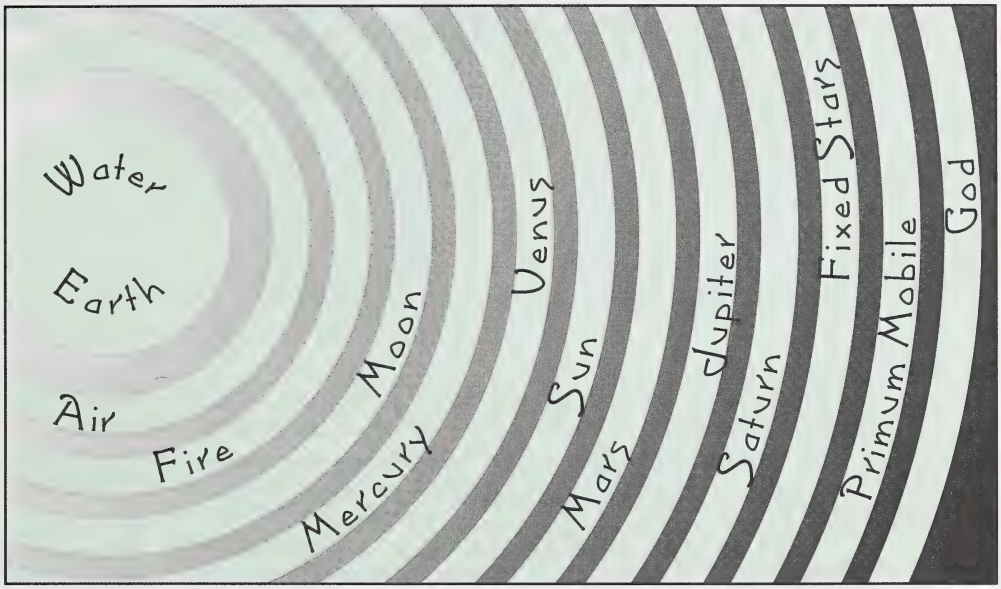
In 1859 Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, a work that challenged the accepted doctrine regarding the beginnings of human life. Darwin's new evolutionary theory perplexed much of the religious establishment and its followers; science seemed to be contradicting traditional religious teachings. Explore your own beliefs about the origin of humanity. Does science provide an adequate answer? How does God figure into this issue?



Science plays a significant role in shaping the way modern people envision the world and the universe. From molecular theory to the "Big Bang Theory," science is accepted by many people today (though by no means all) as **the** source of knowledge about the cosmos. While reading the play you're studying, however, you have to keep in mind that Hamlet is not a modern man with modern notions. Hamlet is supposed to be living around A.D. 1050, which should make him a medieval man. However, Shakespeare didn't feel bound by time restrictions. In many ways, Hamlet embodies the Renaissance ideal of the Elizabethan era. Hamlet the character cannot be divorced from *Hamlet* the play; therefore, it's very important to your understanding of the tragedy to have a firm grasp of the Elizabethan worldview.

Shakespeare lived during a time of scientific upheaval that challenged traditional beliefs about the structure of the universe. Radical ideas were being put forward by people like Copernicus and Galileo. Although many educated Elizabethans were well acquainted with Copernican ideas (that the earth rotates around the sun rather than vice versa) the general public was fairly ignorant of these concepts. Most people still adhered to the Ptolemaic theory of a theocentric – or God-centred – universe.

Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemaeus) was a renowned astronomer from Alexandria who lived during the second century. In the Ptolemaic cosmos (or universe) the earth is the centre of the universe and the planets revolve around it in concentric circles. Outside the planetary spheres is the sphere of the fixed stars. Beyond that is the *primum mobile*, (Latin for "first moving thing"), the outermost sphere, which revolves around the earth from east to west every twenty-four hours. Outside the spheres is God who, with nine hierarchies of angels, reigns in Heaven.



Beyond the sphere of the moon the universe was, believed to be immutable (or unchanging). Mutability (the ability to change) was an earthly occurrence, and Elizabethans were distrustful of change.

The earth was considered to be a microcosm of the universe, the macrocosm. In other words it was thought to be a miniature version of the greater whole – the universe.

The order found in the universe was, then, paralleled on earth. Here there was a predictable order in nature: the seasons, the tides, the alternation of day and night – all repeated with regularity.

Medieval people believed that since there were hierarchies in heaven and in the spheres, so there are and should be ranks and degrees in human society. This belief gives justification for social structure and ranks. Every level has its own subdivisions, and there's room for a particular class to rule over others. The lion is king of the beasts; the eagle soars over birds; the monarch rules over people. The following precepts gave structure and harmony to this society.

- God is supreme in heaven and throughout the cosmos.
- The sun is the chief of the planets.
- The monarch rules his or her earthly domain with divine sanction.
- Reason should rule and direct the life of human beings.

People believed in a "Great Chain of Being" in which every part of heaven and earth is linked but also separate. Humanity is cushioned between the angels above and the beasts below.

GREAT CHAIN OF BEING



The sixteenth-century person would have abhorred the militant conflicts of religious and political beliefs that would distinguish the seventeenth century. An Elizabethan believed there was still a careful order to the universe, a harmony that bound it together. This world order gave meaning and direction to the individual. People knew their places and how to behave.

Since Elizabethans believed that any breach of the chain could damage the whole, they generally feared revolution. The monarch, who ruled by divine right (according to the will of God), represented order in the state. If the monarch were to be injured, deposed, or threatened with civil war, then disorder resulted. You need not look further than the reflections of some of Shakespeare's characters to see how strong was the belief that people must assume their places in the chain – in their proper class and always a little lower than the lowest angels. People could have dignity in their places, but they had to know where those places were; and seldom could they aspire to other stations in life.



Queen Elizabeth, one of England's greatest monarchs, was believed to rule by divine right.

1. The Ghost alludes to the spheres of the heavens when he says to Hamlet in Scene 5, "Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres" (line 17). Why is it appropriate, in the context of the entire scene, for the Ghost to make reference to the stars falling from their spheres?

2. Reexamine Hamlet's line in Scene 5, "The time is out of joint" (line 190). Explain the meaning of this statement within the context of Elizabethan thought.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Activity 6.

Follow-up Activities

If you found the activities difficult, you should complete the Extra Help. If you understand the concepts clearly, you should complete the Enrichment.

Extra Help

Motifs

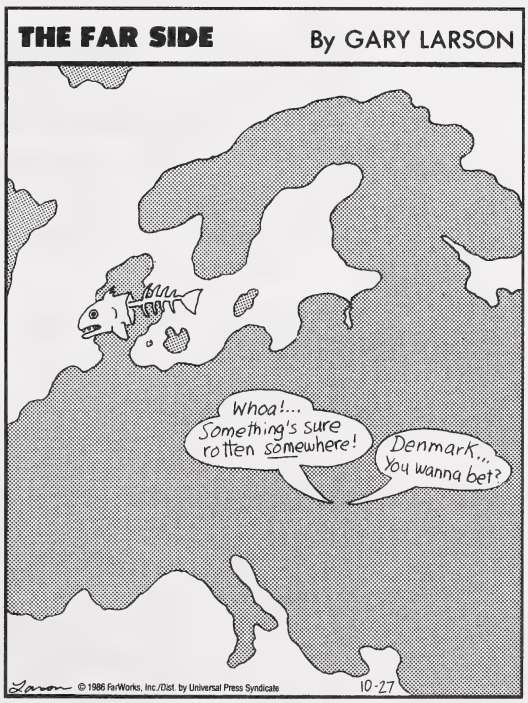
A motif is a recurring theme whether it be in art, music, or literature. For example, Neuschwanstein is a famous castle in southern Bavaria, built by Louis II ("Mad Ludwig") in the nineteenth century. The interior is decorated in a swan motif. This means you'll find swans in various forms and fashions throughout the palace. There are paintings of swans, sculptures of swans, and even taps shaped like swans.

In literature, a motif is a recurring idea, image, or phrase. The fact that it recurs is proof that it's significant and should be paid attention to. While reading *Hamlet*, you'll be asked to monitor two of the major motifs in the play. They are

- Corruption / Poison
- Appearance and Reality



The first motif – that "Something Is Rotten in the State of Denmark" – recurs in many forms throughout the first act. From the play's opening line, the audience is told that something is amiss in the kingdom of Denmark. Bernardo's asking "Who's there?" makes the audience wonder immediately why it's not the sentry, Francisco, who's doing the challenging. Although Horatio is initially skeptical about the existence of the ghost – as evidenced when Marcellus says "Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy" (Scene 1, line 23) – he's astonished and fearful later in the scene when it comes forth: "Most like: it harrows me with fear and wonder" (line 44). Horatio finds it peculiar that the ghost would be dressed in full combat armour: "'Tis strange" (line 64). He concludes that the apparition foretells violence and disorder: "This bodes some strange eruption to our state" (line 69).



[1]

[1] THE FAR SIDE ©1986 FARWORKS, INC./Distributed by UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.



Closely related to this motif is the idea of "poison." Poison appears on a literal level and a figurative one. The literal poison is the hebenon that Claudius has poured into his brother's ear. At the figurative level poison is used metaphorically.

1. How is poison present on the figurative level in Act 1?



Another important motif you'll be exploring is that of Appearance and Reality. Here there's a discrepancy between what seems to be (appearance) and what is in fact reality.

2. Each of the following quotations refers to some kind of disguise. To what hidden truth is each referring? If you're not sure, reread that section of the play; the scene and line numbers are provided.

   a. "Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not "seems." (Scene 2, line 76)

   b. "Foul deeds will rise, / Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes." (Scene 2, lines 255 and 256)

   c. "Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers," (Scene 3, line 127)

   d. "The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown." (Scene 5, line 40)

   e. "The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen;" (Scene 5, line 47)

   f. "O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!" (Scene 5, line 107)

   g. "As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on," (Scene 5, lines 172 and 173)

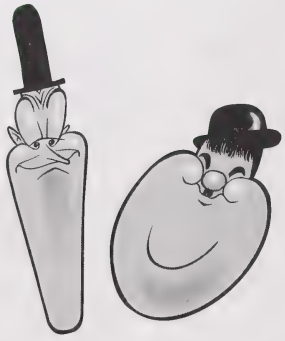
Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Extra Help.

Character Foils



Are you familiar with any of these classic comedy duos?

- Laurel and Hardy
- Abbott and Costello
- Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis
- The Smothers Brothers
- Wayne and Shuster



In each of these teams, one member is the "straight man"; he's the more serious of the pair. The other half is the clown; he makes the silly jokes and finds himself in ridiculous situations.



Can anyone think of any other examples of comedy teams?

How about in the television show Seinfeld*? Jerry Seinfeld and George are opposites in many ways. On* Frasier *too, Frasier and his dad are complete opposites.*





And the movie Twins*. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito play a pair of twins. What makes this funny is that they actually share many of the same characteristics, but they're different in obvious ways too.*

Those are all good examples. In every case, you can see that each pair is made up of character foils. Character foils, as you know, are characters who may be similar in some respects but opposite in other critical ways. Using the concept of foils is common to many comedy couples. In Hamlet*, Shakespeare is using foils, not for the purpose of comedy, but to shed light on the play's protagonist.*



3. Hamlet's main foil is Laertes, but you could consider Fortinbras to be a foil too. Although he has yet to make an entrance, you know enough about him to identify points of comparison and contrast. Create a chart like the one that follows and fill in the blanks.

	Hamlet	Fortinbras
Comparisons (points of similarity)	Hamlet is a young prince of Denmark.	_____ _____ _____
	_____ _____ _____	Fortinbras' uncle became the next king of Norway, leaving Fortinbras powerless.
	Hamlet is seeking revenge for the death of his father.	_____ _____ _____
Contrasts (points of difference)	Hamlet's father was murdered.	_____ _____ _____
	_____ _____ _____	Fortinbras seems to be spoiling for a fight. Does he want revenge for his father, or is he more interested in his reputation?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Extra Help.

The Elizabethan Worldview

Elizabethans had not yet completely embraced the scientific notion that the earth was not the centre of the universe. They held to religious teachings which told them there was a strict harmony and order to the cosmos. They believed that each individual had a role to perform and that that role was dictated by a higher power. The monarch had divine right to rule over his subjects. Any breach of that order could have a tumultuous effect on society. What follows is a chart that outlines the hierarchical parallels between the universe and Denmark.



<table>
<tr><th>Order in Universe</th><th>Order In Denmark</th></tr>
<tr><td>God</td><td rowspan="2">Royal Family
King Claudius Queen Gertrude
Prince Hamlet</td></tr>
<tr><td>Angels</td></tr>
<tr><td>King</td><td rowspan="3">Courtiers
Horatio, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Cornelius, Voltimand, Reynaldo, Osric</td></tr>
<tr><td>Nobles</td></tr>
<tr><td>Merchants/Craftsmen</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Peasants/Serfs</td><td>Soldiers
Marcellus, Bernardo, Francisco</td></tr>
<tr><td>Servants
The players, grave diggers</td></tr>
</table>

4. The Chain of Being is broken in Denmark. What forces are disrupting the universal peace?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 1: Extra Help.

The ghost of King Hamlet burdens his son with the unenviable task of punishing Claudius for his crimes, thereby restoring the kingdom and the universal peace.

Enrichment

Do **any** or **all** of the following questions.

Allusions in Act I

1. Shakespeare makes generous use of biblical and classical allusions in his plays. These references add significance to the total meaning of the work. Here's a list of the principal such allusions occurring in Act I.

   a. god of day (Scene 1, line 152)
   b. first corse (Scene 2, line 105)
   c. Hyperion (Scene 2, line 140)
   d. satyr (Scene 2, line 140)
   e. Niobe (Scene 2, line 149)
   f. Hercules (Scene 2, line 153)
   g. Nemean lion (Scene 4, line 84)
   h. Lethe wharf (Scene 5, line 34)

   Using whatever resources you have at your disposal (your edition of the play, a dictionary, the library, and so on) try to find the meaning of each allusion in the list. Good luck!

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Enrichment.

Shakespearean Language



In Activity 1 Katrin commented that Shakespeare's language impeded her enjoyment of his plays. Although this can at times be true, one can try to guess at meanings through context. What you should try to do is examine the lines before and after any words that give you problems and consider who's speaking and in what situation. Ask yourself, too, what the mood of the speaker is. Answers to questions like these can go a long way in helping you to understand *Hamlet*.

2. The list that follows contains key words or phrases from Act I that are either now antiquated or have come to mean something different. For each one write out a modern "translation." In doing this, your own edition of *Hamlet* will be of tremendous help; however, if the word isn't in the glossary, reread the passage and perhaps you can deduce its meaning from the context. Don't neglect your dictionary!

a. addition (Scene 4, line 20)

b. approve (Scene 1, line 29)

c. change (Scene 2, line 163)

d. cousin (Scene 2, line 64)

e. dearest (Scene 2, line 181)

f. disasters (Scene 1, line 118)

g. doubt (Scene 2, line 254)

h. carefully (Scene 1, line 6)

i. happily (Scene 1, line 134)

j. honest (Scene 5, line 139)

k. husbandry (Scene 3, line 77)

l. impress (Scene 1, line 75)

m. jump (Scene 1, line 65)

n. sensible (Scene 1, line 57)

o. soft (Scene 1, line 126)

p. sometimes (Scene 1, line 49)

q. rivals (Scene 1, line 12)

r. tempt (Scene 4, line 69)

s. vain (Scene 1, line 146)

t. wants (Scene 2, line 150)

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 1: Enrichment.

They All Want to Play Hamlet

The role of Hamlet is coveted by many actors. It's said that Mel Gibson agreed to perform in the film *Lethal Weapon III* on the condition that he be allowed to play Hamlet. Keanu Reeves refused a role worth $7 million so that he could play Hamlet in a theatre in Winnipeg during December of 1994 for two thousand dollars a week. Why would these two actors, not known for their classical training, desire to be Hamlet?

Read the following poem by Carl Sandburg on this very topic. Perhaps it can provide a clue.

They All Want to Play Hamlet[1]

They all want to play Hamlet.
They have not exactly seen their fathers killed
Nor their mothers in a frame-up to kill,
Nor an Ophelia dying with a dust gagging the heart,
Not exactly the spinning circles of singing golden spiders,
Not exactly this have they got at nor the meaning of flowers — O flowers, flowers slung by a dancing girl — in the saddest play the inkfish, Shakespeare, ever wrote;
Yet they all want to play Hamlet because it is sad like all actors are sad and to stand by an open grave with a joker's skull in the hand and then to say over slow and say over slow wise, keen, beautiful words masking a heart that's breaking, breaking,
This is something that calls and calls to their blood.
They are acting when they talk about it and they know it is acting to be particular about it and yet: They all want to play Hamlet.

3. What insights does Sandburg provide in his poem into the popularity of the role of Hamlet?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 1: Enrichment.

If you're a Keanu Reeves fan, it might well have surprised you to learn he was playing Hamlet on a Winnipeg stage. After all, the actor best known for movies like *Speed* and *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* doesn't seem a very likely candidate for Shakespearean drama. And yet, there he was, undertaking what's probably the most challenging role in English-language theatre.

The following is a review of Keanu Reeves' portrayal of Hamlet in Winnipeg. Read the review and see what you think.

Keanu's Uneven Hamlet[2]

Lack of technique hurts, but superstar Reeves never disgraces himself

A usurping new king and his queen coil and uncoil in elevated sexual ecstasy – while stained-glass images of the Crucifixion and the Madonna and her Child provide an ironic visual counterpoint.

Meanwhile, below and in the foreground, another image is taking shape on the stage of the Manitoba Theatre Centre – that of a young prince mourning at the tomb of his murdered father.

Such is our first glimpse of Keanu Reeves as Hamlet.

[1] "They all Want to Play Hamlet" from SMOKE AND STEEL, ©1920 by Harcourt Brace & Company and renewed 1948 by Carl Sandburg. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

[2] Southam News for the article "Keanu's Uneven Hamlet," by Jamie Portman, taken from *The Edmonton Journal*, January 14, 1995, page F2. Reprinted by permission of Southam News.

The scene is nowhere in Shakespeare's text – but it does provide a powerful beginning to what is destined to be the most talked-about production of the current Canadian theatrical season – a production which sold out its 3 1/2 week run months before it opened.

It also gives doting fans – some who have come from as far away as Japan – the chance to get over their initial excitement at seeing Hollywood's hottest young superstar in the flesh before settling down to the serious business of the play itself.

After all, Reeves himself takes playing Shakespeare very seriously indeed. It really isn't his fault that his celebrity status has stirred up such a media circus: foreign press outlets converging on wintry Winnipeg this month have ranged from the respectable (*The Manchester Guardian*) to the disreputable (the U.S. tabloid shows, *Hard Copy* and *Current Affair*).

The 30-year-old Canadian actor, could have been doing another movie this winter. Instead, reportedly to the despair of his manager, he's chosen to come to Canada's oldest established regional theatre – a theatre whose total annual operating budget is less than half the $7-million fee he now commands for a single movie – to play Hamlet for a salary of $2,000 a week.

Given the glare of public scrutiny, it's a courageous initiative for him to have taken.

But it's also a foolhardy one: This is the Everest of roles for even the most experienced of young actors, and they take it on at their peril.

So it's scarcely surprising that this is a frequently uneven characterization. At this stage in his development, Reeves simply lacks the equipment to sustain such a role.

Even so, his Hamlet is not quite the act of effrontery that one might expect. Reeves never disgraces himself.

What he does bring is a strong and sometimes commanding stage presence, emotional sensitivity and genuine warmth of character, a sleek athleticism, and some refreshing moments of humor.

Reeves is also capable on occasion of surging dramatic power. There's also the sequence when Hamlet feigns madness and assumes his "antic disposition" to deceive the court while he plots vengeance.

Here, Reeves's Hamlet is maddening, mercurial, funny and more than a little alarming – which is exactly what this character should be at this point.

But repeatedly, Reeves is undermined by his lack of classical theatre technique.

True, he brings intelligence to the role. But – and this may partly be due to opening night jitters – there's a real problem with a number of Hamlet's speeches. There's a failure to find the right rhythm, phrasing and cadence, to achieve the fusion of sound and meaning so vital in communicating Shakespeare to audiences.

The soliloquies are particularly disappointing – even To Be Or Not To Be is perfunctorily spoken, without conviction or emotional reflection.

But the soliloquies also tend to be staged in a perfunctory manner, lacking the bold theatricality characterizing other aspects of this production. That makes one wonder about the judgment of director Louis Baumander.

Despite some terrific visual effects, this is a fairly conventional reading of Shakespeare's great tragedy, offering us a prince consumed by both sexual jealousy and sexual confusion.

Hence, there is a closet scene in which Hamlet's stabbing of Polonius is allowed to go by in a flash; here, Reeves could have been doing something as mundane as swatting a fly, before getting on to the main concern which is to subject his mother, Gertrude (quiveringly portrayed by Louisa Martin), to a verbal and physical assault that is essentially sexual in nature.

Some aspects of the play seem to interest Baumander far more than others. This can lead to unfortunate choices; for example presenting Claudius and his court in a scene of colorful debauched revelry more appropriate to sun-baked Italy than the grey ramparts of Elsinore.

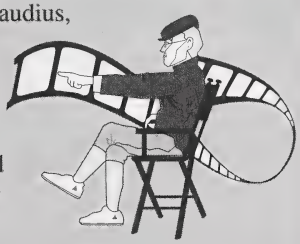
One, therefore, searches in vain for a sustained dramatic sensibility both in this production and in Reeves's performance. On the other hand, there have been productions of Hamlet far more pretentious and far worse at both Stratford and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

And one must give Reeves credit. He is never less than interesting on stage. And on those occasions when he does fail, he does so with honor.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following ideas.

As a casting director for a new, modern movie version of *Hamlet*, write to the producer giving your suggestions as to which stars should play Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius, and Laertes. Give your reasons for each choice you've made.



Since at this point you've read only Act 1 of the play, it's possible you may later revise your ideas on which actors you'd cast in which roles. Come back when you've finished the play and see whether or not you'd stick with your original choices.

Conclusion

There's no better introduction to one of Shakespeare's most admired works than to start to read the play for yourself. The first scene does an exceptional job of immersing the audience in Hamlet's world. The mysterious atmosphere, the appearance of the Ghost, and the impending war combine to grab the attention of the audience and to propel them forward into the action. The last scene suggests more questions than answers. What will Hamlet do now? Is this an "honest" ghost? When and how will Hamlet carry out his revenge?

You've also seen that it's important in coming to understand *Hamlet* that you have some understanding of the philosophies and ideas that prevailed when the play was written. Although the Elizabethan era was one wrought with social and scientific change, the common people still held to the more medieval notions that religion provided the "blueprint" for their universe.

In Section 2 you'll continue your reading of *Hamlet*. In Act 2 Hamlet decides on a course of action to prove Claudius's guilt, and Act 3 provides Hamlet with the perfect opportunity to punish Claudius for this "foul and most unnatural murder." So stay tuned; don't touch that dial!

Assignment Booklet

ASSIGNMENT

In your Assignment Booklet complete the assignment for this section.

SECTION 2 "TO BE, OR NOT TO BE"



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Thus far *Hamlet* has been a ghost story that reaches its conclusion when Hamlet discovers that his Uncle Claudius has murdered his father. At the end of Act 1 our "melancholic prince," stunned by recent events, is himself transformed into a kind of detective, working under the guise of madness. For Hamlet, revenge means more than killing Claudius. That would be simple murder. The burden on Hamlet is much greater; he must publicly demonstrate Claudius's guilt. He must avenge his father's murder honourably without tainting his own soul. Therein lie both his weakness and his greatness.

In this section you'll read Acts 2 and 3 of the play. You'll follow in the footsteps of Hamlet the detective as he ferrets out the spies that abound around him. The detective story culminates in Act 3 when Hamlet manipulates events in order to re-create the murder of his father before Claudius and the entire kingdom. Hamlet the detective then becomes Hamlet the avenger!

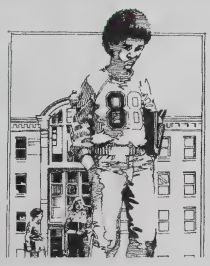
In this section you'll also closely examine a critical issue of the play – Hamlet's madness – and you'll read his most famous soliloquy: "To be, or not to be." Your Section 2 Assignment will allow you to apply both your comprehension of the play and your ability to read and understand Shakespearean English.

Activity 1: Act 2, Scene 1 – "Mad for Thy Love!"

Reading the Play

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:



The basis of any good relationship is trust, whether that relationship is between friends or between a parent and a child. If that trust is broken, the damage may be irreparable. Have you experienced an incident in your life in which you lost your trust in a person close to you? If so, write about it. If you haven't, write about how it would likely affect you if it did occur. How did it make you feel? How did you respond?

Setting the Scene

A couple of months have passed between Acts 1 and 2. Laertes is currently in Paris and has already run out of money. Polonius is about to send him additional funds and is asking his servant, Reynaldo, to spy on Laertes. In the latter part of this opening scene, Ophelia, completely distraught and in tears, rushes to talk to her father after a rather disturbing encounter with Hamlet.

Hamlet

Now read Act 2, Scene 1; then respond to the following questions.

1. In this scene Polonius asks Reynaldo, one of his servants, to spy on Laertes in Paris. Reynaldo is to deliver some money to Laertes and while he is there to find out with what Danes Laertes associates, how and where he spends his money, and what kind of lifestyle he's leading.

   a. How is Reynaldo supposed to discover what Polonius wants to know?

   b. What light does this shed on Polonius?

2. How does Polonius interpret Hamlet's odd behaviour?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 1.



Well, Sue, how would you explain Hamlet's behaviour in front of Ophelia? Is he really mad?

I don't think so. At the end of Act 1 he told us he would be acting with "an antic disposition." I think he's just playing a role; he's doing what he said he was going to do.





I'm not so sure. Hamlet's been under a lot of strain. We know he was suicidal before he even knew about the murder of his father. Let's say he's been "acting" mad for a couple of months now. That has got to have some kind of impact on him psychologically, don't you think?

I think it's premature to say anything conclusive at this point. Perhaps later scenes will help shed some light. So while you're reading, keep an eye out for references to madness by Hamlet and by the other characters.



Dramatic Purposes

Dramatic purpose: *the precise purpose served by each scene in a play – for instance, to develop plot, to reveal theme, or to develop character*

Each scene in *Hamlet* fulfils some **dramatic purpose** or purposes. In other words, the scene contributes in some significant way or ways to the total meaning of the play. A scene can fulfil a number of dramatic purposes; three key ones are as follows.

- Plot development: The scene advances the story line through action or decision making by a major character.
- Character development: The reader gains a deeper understanding of a character by making some inferences based on what the character says or does or what others say about him or her.
- Revelation of theme: A key theme or motif of the play is further explored.

3. How does Scene 1 advance the plot of *Hamlet* ?

4. How does this scene increase the audience's understanding of Polonius?

5. What motifs are further developed in this scene?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 1.

As you continue to read *Hamlet*, try to keep asking yourself what dramatic purpose(s) each scene serves.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following questions.

In the next scene you'll meet the King and Queen discussing Hamlet. How do you think the King has responded to Hamlet's madness? What do you think he will do? Will he believe Polonius's news that Hamlet is mad out of love for Ophelia? Does he really think Hamlet is insane?

Activity 2: Act 2, Scene 2 – "The Play's the Thing"

Reading the Play



Because this scene is quite a lengthy one, it's been broken down into several sections in this activity.



etting the Scene

As you noticed in Scene 1, Hamlet has been behaving very strangely, and this hasn't gone unnoticed by the members of the court. Everyone, especially Claudius, is wondering what's happened to the noble prince. Scene 2 begins with the King and Queen conversing with two of Hamlet's school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The King has ordered them to court to spy on Hamlet in order to help him understand Hamlet's "transformation." The King is already suspicious that Hamlet is only pretending to be mad.



Now read Scene 2 as far as line 84; then respond to the following questions.

1. How have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern responded to the royal request to spy on Hamlet?

2. How does the Queen entice Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to honour this request?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.



Amid the King's concern over Hamlet's "antic disposition," good news arrives. What happens, Aaron?

Voltimand and Cornelius return from Norway having accomplished their goal. The war is off.





So once old Norway knows what his nephew is up to, he stops him?

That's right, Katrin. Old Norway is quite ill and out of touch with recent events. But once Claudius's messengers apprise him of the situation, he forbids Fortinbras ever to attempt war against Denmark again.





But I still don't understand what Fortinbras is up to now. He wants to attack Poland? What's his problem?

Well,Wes, maybe it's just that he's a young prince eager to prove his manhood in battle. Since he can't take on Denmark, he's after Poland instead.





It seems to me he's more obsessed with personal glory than getting revenge for his dad. I mean, where's his commitment?

The situation certainly begs comparison between these two young men. Neither Hamlet nor Fortinbras seems to be fulfilling the task of revenge. In any case, let's read on to find out what Polonius says to Claudius and Gertrude. Keep in mind that he's the bearer of good and bad news.





I know what you mean. The good news is that he can tell the King why Hamlet is "mad."

But on the other hand, Polonius must be considered partly responsible. He's the one who told Ophelia to deny Hamlet "access."





Now read lines 85 to 168 and respond to the following questions.

3. How does the Queen prove to be insightful with respect to her son's madness?

4. Polonius doesn't tell the entire truth to the King and Queen. How does he deceive them?

5. What plan is hatched in order to test Polonius's theory?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Setting the Scene

With the King and Queen gone, Polonius confronts Hamlet. Behind the masquerade of madness, Hamlet makes fun of Polonius. For example, he calls him a fishmonger. Hamlet also equivocates when he's speaking. In other words, he purposefully misunderstands Polonius's questions. When Polonius asks him what he's reading, Hamlet simply replies "words." (Note that Hamlet's behaviour here can be taken as evidence for the theory that in fact he had overheard the plan Polonius hatched with Claudius.) Once Polonius leaves, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern greet Hamlet. Before long Hamlet becomes suspicious of their intentions and forces a confession out of them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern divert Hamlet with the revelation that a troupe of players is on its way to the castle.

Hamlet

Now read lines 169 to 377 and respond to the following questions.

6. Earlier in this scene Polonius told the King and Queen, "Your noble son is mad" (line 92). Do you think Hamlet is mad? Or is he just pretending madness? Or is he just not quite sane? What weight do you attach to his own statement, "I am but mad north-north-west" (line 376).

7. Reexamine Hamlet's lines spoken to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that begin "What a piece of work is a man!" (line 303). This speech represents many of the ideals of humanism: the celebration of people and their potentials. However, the last line betrays Hamlet's state of mind. Explain this last line of the speech: "And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?"



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Hamlet

Setting the Scene

Hamlet is quite excited by the arrival of the players. In them he sees the potential to break the impasse he has come to with respect to Claudius. Toward the end of this scene, Hamlet asks the actors to give him a speech and then requests that they perform a play called "The Murder of Gonzago." The scene ends with Hamlet's second soliloquy, in which he criticizes himself for his inaction.

Now read to the end of the scene. Again, you might wish to listen to Hamlet's soliloquy if you have an audio or video version of the play; hearing the words spoken is a wonderful aid to comprehension.



Well, how did you make out with the rest of the scene?

Pretty well, but I had a lot of problems understanding the speeches of the players.





Yeah, me too. I thought everything in this play had some kind of relevance, but I couldn't understand what Aeneas's speech to Dido had to do with Hamlet.

I can appreciate your confusion. First, let me assure you that the speech about Priam's slaughter does fit in thematically with the play. The whole speech revolves around Pyrrhus killing Priam as revenge for his own father's death; sounds a bit like Hamlet, *doesn't it? To appreciate it fully you need some background in classical mythology. At the end of this section in the Enrichment you'll find additional information on this whole issue.*



Now respond to the following questions.

8. The introduction of the players fulfils an important dramatic purpose. What is it? Explain your response.

9. Several times in the play, Hamlet compares himself with others whose actions are disproportionate to the motivations behind them. For example, in his soliloquy beginning on line 544, Hamlet compares himself with the actor who uttered the speech about the fall of Troy. How does Hamlet's "performance" contrast with the actor's?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Note how this scene ends with Hamlet's determination to gather better proof of the Ghost's story. It may strike you as odd that Hamlet needs yet more evidence; but would you, in the light of day, commit murder based on a story you'd been told by an apparition on misty battlements? And isn't it true that as time passes doubt sets in? And remember, Elizabethans were very superstitious people. They would have accepted the notion that the devil could appear to someone in order to lure that person into sinning. In fact, the classic story of the devil visiting a human being and making a deal for his or her soul originates in the play *Dr. Faustus*, written by one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Christopher Marlowe.

Character Foils



Scene 2 provides you with some additional material with which to compare Hamlet with Fortinbras. Old Norway, upon hearing the news regarding his nephew, immediately responds by arresting Fortinbras. Both Hamlet and Fortinbras are seeking revenge for a dead father, yet their reactions to obstacles are telling.



10. Fortinbras quite calmly changes his focus from Denmark to Poland. What does this say about his character?

11. Hamlet has yet to act. In fact, he puts the accusing word *coward* into his own mouth. Is he a coward? Why has he not acted so far against Claudius?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 2.

Activity 3: Act 3, Scene 1 – "Conscience Does Make Cowards of Us All"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

Act 3 begins with Claudius receiving Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's report about Hamlet. When questioned, these two spies can offer no explanation for Hamlet's "antic disposition." Consequently, Claudius and Polonius make use of Ophelia to try to unravel Hamlet's character. When Hamlet appears, he's contemplative and delivers the most famous soliloquy in the English language: "To be, or not to be." His subsequent encounter with Ophelia is very unpleasant, and he quarrels with her. At the scene's conclusion, the King, convinced that Hamlet poses a real threat, decides to send him to England.



Read lines 1 to 55; then respond to the following questions.

1. What do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to the King about their mission?

2. For the first time in the play, Claudius admits his guilt to the audience. How does he feel about his crimes?

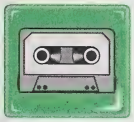
Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 3.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following ideas.

Try to recall an incident in which someone did you an injustice. Perhaps you were wrongly accused of some crime or exploited in some way. How did you feel as a result? Were you angry? Did you vow revenge? How did you feel about it the next day? Were you just as angry? Did you carry through with your plans for revenge? How do you feel about the issue today? Has the passage of time changed your perspective?







And now for the moment you've been waiting for; it's time to read the most famous soliloquy in our language (probably in any language) – Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" meditation on life and death. Turn now to line 56 and read this soliloquy carefully (to line 91). Be sure to read, as well, any explanations and discussions your edition of the play has to offer.



Once again, it's recommended that if possible you listen to an audiotape – or watch a videotape – that will allow you to experience a trained actor delivering this, the best-known of Hamlet's soliloquies. If, after working through the soliloquy, you still have comprehension problems, question 3 that follows should help.

3. Paraphrasing, as you know, involves reworking an original speech or piece of writing into your own words. This provides an excellent method of determining the precise meaning of a passage. You've already had experience paraphrasing one of Hamlet's soliloquies – in your Section 1 Assignment; but now it's time to put your skills to work on the most famous of all soliloquies.

   If you find this sort of activity challenging, it might help to break the speech down into manageable units as shown in the chart that follows. Why not make yourself a similar chart and fill in the right-hand side?

To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them. To die: to sleep: No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation Devoutly to be wish'd To die, to sleep; To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause: there's the respect That makes calamity of so long life: For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pang of despised love, the law's delay, The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of the unworthy takes, When he himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear, To grunt and sweat under a weary life, But that the dread of something after death, The undiscover'd country from whose bourn No traveller returns, puzzles the will, And makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, And thus the native hue of resolution Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, And enterprises of great pith and moment With this regard their currents turn awry And lose the name of action.	

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 3.

Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy can be considered a theme speech. In many ways it sums up the essence of Hamlet's dilemma about killing Claudius and his despair with the human condition. Most critics interpret the soliloquy as a suicide speech in which Hamlet is contemplating taking his own life. Some critics, however, argue that Hamlet is really trying to come to grips with what he should do rather than debating his own suicide. They contend that Hamlet has already told the audience in his first soliloquy that suicide is not something he would attempt because it's against God's law: "Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!" (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 131 and 132).

According to this interpretation, the first line of the soliloquy sums up the crucial dilemma that Hamlet faces. Which course of action is more honourable? Should he patiently put up with the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" or should he boldly oppose them even if he can't win? This is a true dilemma because the consequences of both courses are undesirable. To do nothing about Claudius and let a murdering usurper continue to reign and "whore" his mother would be shameful to him. But to fight against Claudius has its risks as well.

This soliloquy is often referred to as a suicide speech because Hamlet does talk about suicide in general terms and wonders why people put up with misfortune and suffering. Hamlet concludes that it's people's fear of what follows after life that makes them endure misery. Hamlet also tells us that thinking takes away people's ability to act. Perhaps that's why Hamlet has not yet swept to his revenge. The longer he thinks about it, the less convinced he is that he should kill Claudius. He's no longer sure that Claudius is guilty, and he's unwilling to risk his own damnation. This attitude is also a testimony to Hamlet's essential goodness in that he gives the benefit of the doubt to his fellow man in general, and to Claudius in particular.



Now read to the end of Scene 1 and respond to the questions that follow.

4. Claudius and Hamlet show themselves to be quite different types of people in this scene. Contrast these two characters based on this scene.

5. Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia is savage, particularly after the line "Where's your father?" (line 130). Can you explain why?



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 3.

This scene ends with Polonius maintaining that Hamlet is mad because of his daughter. He then proposes that Gertrude summon Hamlet to her chamber later, where he will, once again, hide behind a curtain in order to listen in on their conversation.



Hamlet was sure rough on Ophelia; in fact, he acted like a real jerk in my opinion. I thought they were supposed to be in love.

Good point. I think part of the explanation for his behaviour lies in the fact that Hamlet has figured out that Ophelia is part of a scheme to spy on him. He then puts Ophelia in the same category as his mother. He thinks that all his loved ones have now turned against him.





Well, Claudius sure doesn't waste any time getting rid of Hamlet. Too bad Hamlet isn't as decisive.



That's true enough, and that difference says much about the kind of people they are.

Motifs

Appearance and Reality



The motif of Appearance and Reality is again echoed in Claudius's aside (lines 50 to 55). Polonius's casual comment that "with devotion's visage, / And pious action, we do sugar o'er / The devil himself" catches Claudius off guard. Claudius responds privately by comparing himself to a prostitute. His words camouflage his ugly deeds just as the "plastering art" (application of makeup) conceals the ugliness of the prostitute. It's noteworthy that this is the first time that Claudius reveals his guilt to the audience.

Activity 4: Act 3, Scene 2 – "Frighted with False Fire!"

Reading the Play

Setting the Scene

The scene begins in a low key as Hamlet gives instructions on acting techniques to the professional players. While the players make their final preparations, Hamlet praises Horatio as his best friend and enlists his support in observing Claudius during the performance of the play. Tension mounts as Hamlet teases Polonius and Ophelia. When the King witnesses the reenactment of the murder he committed, he rushes out of the hall. Hamlet enjoys himself and his triumph when Polonius arrives to say his presence is requested by the Queen.

Now read Scene 2 as far as line 89.

Hamlet gives the actors some "dos and don'ts" about acting. Many critics feel that these cautions represent Shakespeare's own views on acting.

- **Dos:** Hamlet tells the actors to speak fluently and distinctly and to use only natural gestures. The gestures should match the words.
- **Don'ts:** Hamlet advises the players not to overact a passionate speech to the **groundlings** who, being poorly educated, can only understand the mimes. He also cautions them not to make fools of themselves and not to let the clowns steal the show.

Groundlings: lower class Elizabethan theatre-goers who stood on the ground around the stage to watch a play



While in Shakespeare's day London had theatres like the one shown here, bands of travelling players still moved about, performing plays wherever they could gather an audience.

Hamlet's pointer to "suit the action to the word" relates to the play thematically. Ironically, suiting the action to the word strikes at the heart of Hamlet's problem. There's a discrepancy between what he says he'll do and what he actually does. Hamlet needs to heed his own advice and learn to match his actions with his words.

Now respond to the following question.

1. What does the audience learn about Horatio from lines 58 to 76 of Hamlet's speech?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 4.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following ideas.

In his speech to the players, Hamlet says that the purpose of drama is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature" (lines 21 and 22). In other words, (to use a popular cliché) its purpose is to tell it like it is. In your Writing Folder discuss this idea. Do you think that today television shows and movies "hold…the mirror up to nature"?

A good part of the rest of the scene involves Hamlet in quick verbal exchanges with Claudius, Polonius, and Ophelia. For example, in one exchange the King asks "How fares our cousin Hamlet?" (line 91). Hamlet replies, "Excellent, i 'faith; of the chameleon's dish: I eat / the air, promise-crammed; you cannot feed capons so." Here Hamlet plays on the word *fare*. The king means "does" but Hamlet interprets it as "eats." As well, he says he eats the "air" which means emptiness. Hamlet is making reference to Claudius's empty promises that Hamlet will one day succeed him as king.



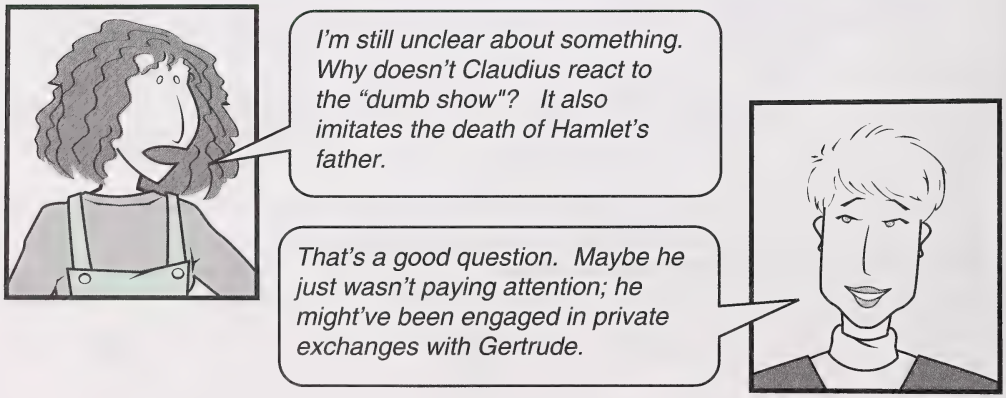
Now read to the end of Scene 2 and respond to the questions that follow. Read carefully, and consult your text's notes to catch on to Hamlet's clever repartee.

2. How many parallels can you identify between *The Mousetrap* and King Hamlet's murder?

3. Describe the effect of the play on Claudius.

4. What are Hamlet's mood and intention as he goes to see his mother at the end of this scene?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 4.





Hamlet talked about "dumb shows" at the opening of the scene. He said that the groundlings, the poorer patrons, were capable of understanding only the "inexplicable dumb shows."

You're quite right. And that would also help explain Claudius's lack of response. He might simply have ignored the pantomime because he thought it was beneath him.



Motifs

Corruption



The motif of corruption in Denmark continues strong in this scene. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, for example, now are openly acting as agents of the King, but they pretend they love Hamlet. Hamlet asks why they're trying to trap him: "…why do you go about to recover the wind of me, / as if you would drive me into a toil?" (lines 337 and 338). Hamlet compares his "friends" to hunters who are upwind to drive their quarry (Hamlet) into a trap.

Activity 5: Act 3, Scene 3 – "O, My Offence Is Rank"

Reading the Play





etting the Scene

A very nervous and frightened Claudius prepares to send Hamlet off to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Polonius proceeds to the Queen's closet where he can overhear Hamlet and Gertrude's conversation. The mousetrap play has been successful; it has caught the "conscience of the King," who now attempts to pray for forgiveness. Hamlet happens upon the vulnerable Claudius and is presented with the proverbial "golden opportunity" to repay Claudius for his father's murder. But, Hamlet chooses to wait…



Read all of Scene 3; then respond to the questions that follow.

1. What does the audience learn further about Claudius from his soliloquy in this scene?

2. Why does Hamlet choose not to kill Claudius when he has the chance?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 5.

Did you note the final irony in this scene? Hamlet convinces himself not to kill Claudius while he's praying, but it turns out that the King hadn't really been able to pray at all. As Claudius himself says, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: / Words without thoughts never to heaven go."



Most critics refer to this scene as the "prayer scene" for obvious reasons. It's a crucial scene in the play. Any ideas why, Sue?

It seems to me that Hamlet has made a mistake – a serious one. He should've killed Claudius when he had the chance.





I think so too. He couldn't have asked for a better moment, but he thought about it too much. He has to have his revenge to be just perfect.

I'd agree with you there, Wes. And Sue, your instincts are also correct. This scene will turn out to be the turning point – or climax – of the play. From this point on, rather than playing the mouse while Hamlet, the cat, plays with him, Claudius will seize the initiative.



Motifs

Appearance and Reality



Hamlet takes people at face value. Claudius appears to be praying; therefore, he must be praying. Hamlet has forgotten his own words in Act 1 when he said that anyone can put on an act and appear to be sad and mournful: "… these indeed seem, / For they are actions that a man might play;" (Scene 2, lines 83 and 84). But Claudius is a "smiling, damned villain" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 107) who has successfully fooled everyone into believing he's kind and virtuous. As is written in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, "All that glisters is not gold."

Activity 6: Act 3, Scene 4 – "I Must Be Cruel, Only to Be Kind"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

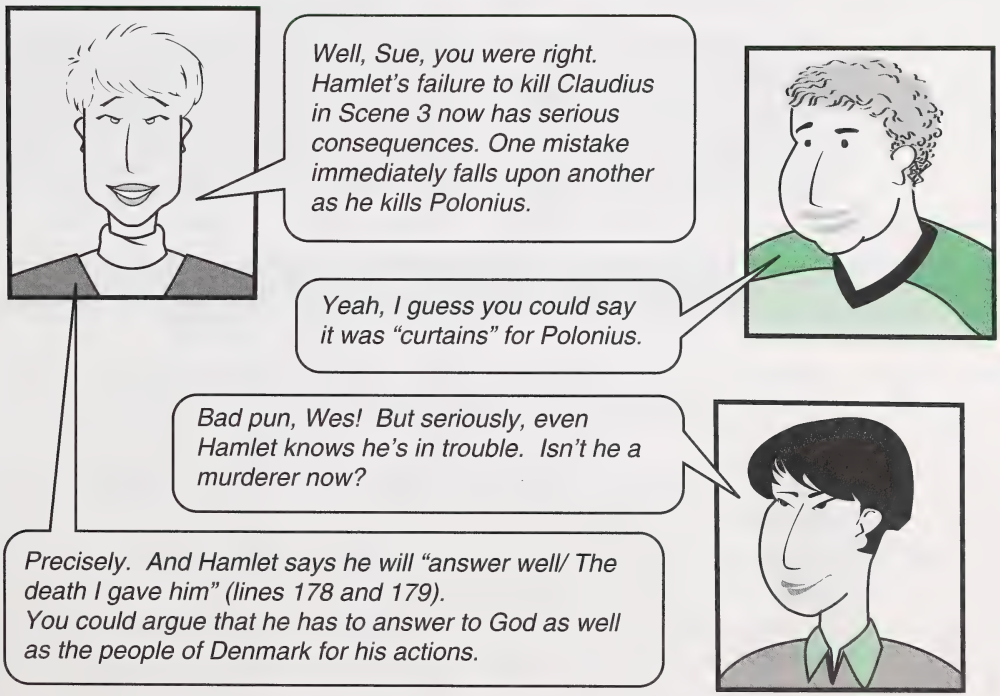
Polonius advises the Queen to speak frankly with Hamlet and then hides behind a curtain (arras). During the course of their conversation, Polonius fears for the Queen and calls for help. Mistaking Polonius for the King, Hamlet runs his sword through the curtain and slays Polonius. Hamlet continues to confront his mother with her evil deeds when the Ghost appears to Hamlet and urges him to redouble his efforts on the King. After the Ghost leaves, Hamlet convinces her that he's not mad, and she seems to listen to his urgings that she stay clear of Claudius. The scene ends as Hamlet gets ready to leave for England.



Now read the entire scene and respond to the following questions.

1. Illustrate from Scene 4 Hamlet's feelings toward his mother.
2. What proof is there that Hamlet believes he has killed the King?
3. Hamlet charges his mother with several crimes. What are they?
4. After the Ghost has appeared, Hamlet appeals to his mother to reform. In what way?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Activity 6.



Motifs

Corruption



In this scene, often referred to as the "mirror scene," Hamlet becomes, metaphorically, a glass in which you can see the corruption in Denmark. Hamlet is a mirror also to his mother's soul in which she can "see the inmost part of [herself]" (line 21). And he is successful. The Queen urges Hamlet to say no more because she's overcome with guilt over the "black and grained spots" in her soul (line 92). But once the Ghost enters, Gertrude exclaims that Hamlet is mad: "This is the very coinage of your brain" (line 139). Hamlet is quick to respond that she should not use his madness as an excuse to cover up her corruption. He says that she's using his madness as a scab to cover an ulcer that's infected underneath:



> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks:
> It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> While rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen. (lines 147 to 151)

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:

Act 3 ends on a turbulent note. Polonius has been slain, and Claudius is about to send Hamlet to England with letters that will "marshall [him] to knavery." In your folder write out your predictions for Act 4. Consider Claudius's reaction to Polonius's death. How will Laertes and Ophelia react when they hear the news?

Follow-up Activities

If you found the activities difficult, you should complete the Extra Help. If you understand the concepts clearly, you should complete the Enrichment.

Extra Help

The Issue of Hamlet's Madness

You've now completed a reading of Acts 2 and 3 of *Hamlet*. In Act 1, Hamlet is melancholic and suicidal until he learns of the murder of his father by Claudius. In Act 2 Hamlet becomes a detective on the trail of a murderer. A critical issue in the play is raised when he chooses not to rush downstairs and kill Claudius (as we'd expect any red-blooded hero to do) but rather to put on "an antic disposition."

1. An often-debated question is whether Hamlet is mad. You must consider both sides of the issue and come to your own conclusions. For the purposes of this exercise imagine that you're arguing the case that Hamlet is sane. Make a chart like the one that follows and, in the right-hand column, fill in the justification for your side of the argument. This first one is done as an example.

The Case for the Affirmative	The Case for the Negative
Hamlet is unbalanced by the shocking news of his father's murder by Claudius.	*Hamlet is only temporarily stunned by this incredible news. He never goes insane.*
Immediately after the disappearance of the Ghost, Hamlet is irrational. He compares his head to a "distracted globe" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 98). Even Horatio calls his words "wild and whirling" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 134). Hamlet must be mad.	
Hamlet's erratic behaviour toward Ophelia as reported by her in Act 2, Scene 1 is proof that Hamlet is mad.	
Hamlet admits himself that he is mad: "... it hath made me mad" (Act 3, Scene 1, line 148)	
Hamlet's violent outbursts against his mother in Act 3, Scene 4 are sure signs of an unstable mind. Even his mother says "Alas! he's mad" (Act 3, Scene 4, line 107).	

Compare your chart with the one in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.

2. To assess the matter of Hamlet's madness, you also need to examine what Hamlet says about this issue himself. Examine each of his own comments about his aberrant conduct and explain their significance.

   a. "To put an antic disposition on," (Act 1, Scene 5, line 173).

   b. "I am but mad north-north-west:" (Act 2, Scene 2, line 376).

   c. "That I essentially am not in madness, / But mad in craft." (Act 3, Scene 4, lines 189 and 190)

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.



In your debate over Hamlet's madness you must also weigh what others say about him. Now Polonius believes until his death that Hamlet is mad, but can you trust Polonius's judgement? Even he admits, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 204 and 205).

Claudius, by contrast, seems to suspect from the beginning that Hamlet is simulating madness. When speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he asks them to find out why "he puts on this confusion" (Act 3, Scene 1, line 2). And later in Act 3, after eavesdropping on Hamlet and Ophelia's conversation, he's convinced of Hamlet's sanity: "Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little, / Was not like madness. There's something in his soul / O'er which his melancholy sits on brood" (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 165 to 167).

3. What other evidence can you present to corroborate Claudius's belief that Hamlet isn't really mad?

4. How do the King and Queen feel about Hamlet's madness? Give reasons for your response.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.

Hamlet's "To Be, or Not to Be" Soliloquy

Hamlet has a dilemma. He's by nature a thinker and a philosopher in a corrupt world that demands he take action against a murderer. Now if this were a modern film starring Arnold Schwarzeneggar, Steven Seagal, or Sylvester Stalone, you know there would be little thinking involved; the protagonist would simply finish Claudius off in a nice, satisfying bloodbath. These modern-day heroes wouldn't hesitate because they're flat, comic-strip type characters who always win.

By contrast, Hamlet tells you (in his own words) that he's not a hero. In his first soliloquy (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 152 and 153) he declares that Claudius is no more like his father than he (Hamlet) is like Hercules. In his second soliloquy Hamlet formulates an important question "Am I a coward?" (Act 2, Scene 2, line 567). Is he? The answer to this question isn't an easy one, but it forms the basis for understanding Hamlet's third and most memorable soliloquy: "To be, or not to be." First you must understand these two key terms: *coward* and *hero*.



Ms. Jensen: I once heard Rick Hanson, who, as you may remember, crossed the country in his wheelchair, give a speech at a convention. At one point he said that people had labelled him a hero, but that he really wasn't one; he was just like anybody else. Would you agree?

Aaron: In one respect, yes. There are probably lots of people capable of doing what he did, but there's a big difference: he did it and they didn't.

Sue: It seems to me that every person is capable of being a hero, of being more than they are. It comes down to a willingness to try harder – " to go the extra mile," as my father would say.

Ms. Jensen: That's a good point. I think an essential aspect of being a hero is a willingness to sacrifice. How many people are willing to give up something like time or money or energy for what they believe in? What about the one thing that people would consider to be the most precious – life itself? John Steinbeck wrote in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* that he worried about the day that people wouldn't be willing to die for a concept. He was saying that the world needs heroes in order to change it for the better. Now most people would consider Rick Hansen to be a hero as a result of his accomplishments in his "Man in Motion" tour. The same goes for Terry Fox. What makes these individuals "heroes"?

Aaron: They were idealists who believed they could make a difference. They chose to live their dreams rather than just dream about them. So many people I know feel powerless and say "Oh, I could never do that."

Marie: I think they also had the courage to do what most people would consider to be extraordinary. They were unwilling to compromise their principles.

Ms. Jensen: I agree. But it's also important to note that courage isn't an absence of fear; it's a willingness to face one's fears. Now what about a coward? If we agree that everyone has fears, what makes a coward different from a hero?

Marie: That's easy. Cowards won't make sacrifices. They want to hold on to what they've got.

Aaron: That's right. Cowards put themselves first; heroes put others first.

5. In Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, Caesar says "Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once." How would you interpret this statement in the context of the preceding discussion?

In his soliloquy Hamlet is wrestling with this very issue. Should he be a coward or a hero? Why is this such a dilemma? The reason is that being a hero is more than what television or film heroes would have you believe. Real heroes usually suffer greatly, and many heroes who are awarded medals receive them posthumously. Hamlet must accept a destiny that will likely lead to his own demise, a destiny that he curses: "O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!" (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 190 and 191). He must make the tough decision and fight against injustice – against Claudius – and be willing to face the consequences of his actions.



Now reread Hamlet's soliloquy and the paraphrase you did in Activity 3; then respond to the following questions.

6. Describe the tone of this soliloquy.

7. How does Hamlet's soliloquy move from his own specific situation to humankind's problem generally?

8. Hamlet tells the audience in the latter part of the soliloquy why he's not a hero when he states "conscience does make cowards of us all" (Act 3, Scene 1, line 84). Explain what he means by this statement.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 2: Extra Help.

Enrichment

Do **one** or **more** of the following.

Aeneas's Speech to Dido

At first glance Hamlet's request of the player to perform Aeneas's speech to Dido (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 431 to 515) appears immaterial to the play. Yet it's significant because the tale is really about one man, Pyrrhus, seeking revenge for the death of his father, Achilles, the hero of the Greek army. The following is a recap of the main events surrounding the story of the Trojan War as recounted in *The Iliad* by the Greek poet Homer and in *The Aeneid* by the Roman poet Virgil.

The story begins with a wedding feast among the gods when Eris, the goddess of Discord, throws an apple onto a table with the words "for the most beautiful" inscribed on it. Three goddesses – Hera, the wife of Zeus, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love – all claim this apple. Hermes, the messenger god, takes all three women to Paris, a prince of Troy, to decide who most deserves the apple. Each goddess promises Paris a gift in exchange for his vote. Hera offers him royal power, Athena promises to make him victorious in battle, and Aphrodite promises him the most beautiful woman on Earth. Paris chooses Aphrodite's offer.



Now, the most beautiful of all women turns out to be Helen, who happens to be married to Menelaus, the King of Sparta. While Menelaus is away, Paris spirits Helen off to Troy (which probably existed in what is now Turkey). Menelaus calls upon all the Greek princes to help him rescue his wife. (That's why Helen's face is said to have "launched a thousand ships.")

The chief warrior on the side of the Greeks is Achilles, whose mother earlier tried to make her son immortal by dipping him in the river in Hades, the Styx. Of course, she held him by the ankle so he wouldn't fall in; thus, the only vulnerable part of his body was his ankle. (Which is why we still talk of a person's weakness as his or her "Achilles' heel.")

On the Trojan side there's Priam, the king, and his queen, Hecuba. Their son Hector is the principal military hero in the Trojan army.

Now the siege of Troy lasts ten long years, primarily as a result of interventions on the parts of the gods. But during the tenth year of the war, Achilles kills Hector. Because Hector had killed Achilles' best friend, Patroclus, Achilles dishonours Hector's body by dragging it behind a chariot around Troy for twelve days. Finally Priam ransoms the corpse and Hector is buried.

However, Achilles himself doesn't have long to live. In a later battle Paris's arrow fatally wounds him in the heel. Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, seeking revenge for the death of his father, slaughters Paris's father, Priam, in front of his wife, Hecuba.

One of the few surviving princes of Troy is Aeneas, who leaves the city on the night of its collapse, taking with him his son and his father. He gathers some forces and a small fleet and sets sail to begin a new Troy. While sailing for Italy, his fleet is scattered by a storm. The survivors gather together in northern Africa where Dido, the queen of Carthage, welcomes them. It turns out to be Aeneas's destiny to found the city of Rome – and eventually the Roman Empire.



Now reread the speech of the First Player (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 465 to 494); then answer the following question.

1. In what ways is Pyrrhus's killing of Priam similar to Hamlet's desire for revenge on Claudius?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 2: Enrichment.

If you're interested in the story further, you may wish to read Book II of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which gives a fuller account of the sack of Troy, or Christopher Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, which is probably the more immediate inspiration for the speech in *Hamlet*.

The Elsinore Enquirer

2. Choose a scene or part of a scene from either Act 2 or Act 3 and write a news headline and first paragraph for *The Elsinore Enquirer*. For your article, try to capture the main part of the plot of that scene and then create a sensationalized version of what happened.

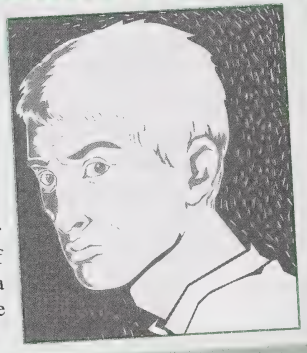
   Here's one student's response to this assignment that can serve as an example of what you might do. This article is based on Act 2, Scene 1, where Hamlet confronts Ophelia.

The ELSINORE Enquirer

SHOCKING
EXCLUSIV
DETAILS INSI

PRINCE CAUGHT WITH HIS SOCKS DOWN!

Agents for *The Elsinore Enquirer* have reported a rather bizarre encounter between the lady Ophelia and Denmark's noble prince, Hamlet (who regular readers will be aware has been acting more than a little strange this past while). Sources close to the Crown tell us that Hamlet confronted his "special friend" without his hat on. And what's more, his coat was undone and his socks were down around his ankles. The rumour mill has it that Ophelia has rejected Hamlet as a suitor which has sent the prince into a decline of some kind (some sources suggest a deep-seated depression or even a state of psychosis). Needless to say, Papa Polonius is rather disturbed by this latest turn of events and may be seeking a restraining order from the King.



A Radio Call-in Show

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:



Imagine that Hamlet is a guest on a radio call-in show just after the events of Act 3 have occurred. Script – and, if you wish, make an audiotape of – the show, in which Hamlet responds to callers.

Conclusion

Act 3 represents the end of the road for Hamlet the detective. He has successfully caught the "conscience of the king"; he has the proof of the King's guilt. He stands ready to fulfil his destiny; but when furnished with the perfect opportunity, he shrinks from his purpose. Hamlet "overthinks" the situation and awaits another opportunity. But it's too late, and Hamlet's failure to kill Claudius in the "prayer scene" leads to disaster – the death of Polonius. The detective becomes the murderer. Claudius now has the initiative and quickly prepares for Hamlet's removal from court.

Act 3 ends with many unanswered questions:

- How will Hamlet escape the clutches of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and return to court to fulfil his duty?
- Will Laertes also want revenge for the murder of his father?
- How will Gertrude respond to Hamlet's earnest appeals to "Assume a virtue" (Act 3, Scene 4, line 162)?
- What about Claudius? Does he have the necessary skill to appease his court once they find out what's going on? As Hamlet himself says "… the players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all" (Act 3, Scene 2, lines 138 and 139).

Assignment Booklet

ASSIGNMENT

In your Assignment Booklet complete the assignment for this section.

SECTION 3 "THE READINESS IS ALL"

The plot of *Hamlet* defies definition. Judging by Act 1, you could argue that it's a ghost story. Acts 2 and 3 might tempt you to call it a detective story. And looking at Acts 4 and 5, you'd probably label it a revenge story. Which is it? The answer is clear: it's all of them, and it's also much more than that. *Hamlet* represents one man's attempt to seek out the truth even if, as Polonius says in Act 2, "it were hid indeed / Within the centre [of the earth]"

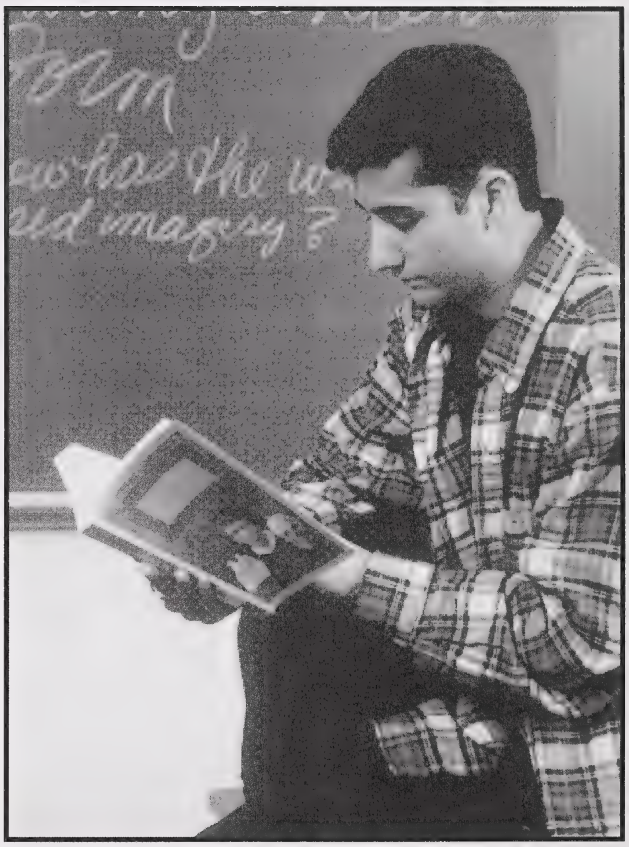


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Hamlet, so far, has achieved only part of his goal. He's exposed Claudius as the villain he is and forced his mother to turn her eyes into her soul. But now he must fulfil his destiny by becoming Hamlet the avenger.

In this section you'll read Acts 4 and 5 of the play. You'll follow Hamlet as he wrestles with questions concerning his own mortality, until, at last, he accepts with determined resolution that his "thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!"

In this section you'll also discuss the tragic structure of the play and look at Hamlet as a tragic hero. As well, you'll examine closely the play's most critical issue: Hamlet's delay.

Your Section 3 Assignment and – to a greater extent – your Final Module Assignment will give you the chance to synthesize what you've learned about *Hamlet* and Shakespearean drama while engaging in a critical analysis of aspects of the play.

Activity 1: Act 4, Scenes 1 to 3 – "How Shall This Bloody Deed Be Answer'd?"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

Scene 1 follows just a few short minutes after the end of Act 3, Scene 4. Claudius has come to Gertrude's chamber to hear the results of her discussion with Hamlet. The Queen tells him about Polonius's death which makes the King even more convinced that it's perilous to "let [Hamlet's] madness range" (line 2).



Now read Scene 1 and respond to the following questions.

1. Is there any evidence in Scene 1 that Gertrude's reformation has begun? Explain.
2. What new traits of Claudius's character are revealed in this scene?
3. What political problems does Claudius now face as a result of Polonius's death?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 1.

Setting the Scene

In Scene 2 Hamlet refuses to divulge the location of Polonius's body to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He then refuses to follow them to Claudius.



Now read Scene 2 and then respond to the following questions.

4. What is Hamlet's estimation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Explain with examples.
5. In the preceding scene Gertrude says of Hamlet, "… he weeps for what is done" (line 27). Does Hamlet's behaviour in this scene corroborate this viewpoint? Explain your response.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 1.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:

In this scene, Claudius intimates that he has a number of fears. Write down as many of them as you can think of. What would you be most afraid of if you were Claudius?



Setting the Scene

Hamlet is brought before the King; and after much circumlocution, Hamlet reveals the whereabouts of Polonius's remains. Claudius notifies Hamlet that he'll be sent to England, ostensibly for his own protection.



Now read Scene 3; then respond to the following questions.

6. Why does Claudius not take strong action against Hamlet?

7. Hamlet engages in **black humour** in this scene? Identify as many examples as you can.

Black humour: humour derived from topics normally considered decidedly unfunny – usually death

8. Hamlet's morose jokes reflect in him a morbid preoccupation with death. Why would Hamlet be so absorbed with this topic?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 1.

This scene ends on an ominous note: Claudius reveals in his last speech that the sealed letters he's written express his wish that Hamlet be put to death in England.

Motifs

Death



Another motif running throughout *Hamlet* is that of death. You've noted earlier Hamlet's preoccupation with death, and his speeches in the scenes you've just read reveal this preoccupation once again. Initially, Hamlet described death as a release from the sufferings of this world. Why put up with the "whips and scorns of time" (Act 3, Scene 1, line 71) when death would bring a welcome respite? In this scene, however, Hamlet's references to Polonius's decaying body illustrate his current view of death in terms of rot and decay – which relates, in turn, to the play's overriding motif of corruption and rottenness. Hamlet ruminates about the cycle of life as he prepares himself to risk his own life by taking on Claudius.

Activity 2: Act 4, Scene 4 – "My Thoughts Be Bloody, or Be Nothing Worth!"

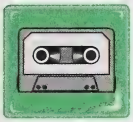
Reading the Play

Setting the Scene

While accompanying Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on their way to the ship, Hamlet stops to speak to a captain of Fortinbras's army, which is making its way across Denmark en route to Poland. The willingness of these thousands of men to die for a piece of land that's almost worthless reminds Hamlet of his own faltering efforts at revenge.







Now read Scene 4 and respond to the following questions. Once again, try, if possible, to watch or listen to a version of the soliloquy you'll encounter in this scene.

1. Hamlet's soliloquy in this scene is very reminiscent of his second soliloquy – "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" (Act 2, Scene 2). How are the two soliloquies alike?

2. In this soliloquy Hamlet also returns to the notion that "conscience does make cowards of us all." (Act 3, Scene 1, line 84) Quote the appropriate lines in this soliloquy that echo this concept.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 2.

Character Foils



Hamlet and Fortinbras are starkly contrasted in this scene. Fortinbras is soldierly and clearly a young man of action. Hamlet, in contrast, is an intellectual more prone to reflection than action.

3. Reexamine the following lines by Hamlet. How does Hamlet distinguish himself from Fortinbras in this part of the soliloquy?

> Rightly to be great
> Is not to stir without great argument,
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
> When honour's at the stake.
> – Act 4, Scene 4, lines 52 to 55

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 2.



Motifs

Corruption



Hamlet is puzzled by the eagerness of Poland's decision to garrison this "little patch of ground" that's essentially valueless. Hamlet observes that Fortinbras's desire for conquest is the result of internal corruption not apparent to an outside observer:

> This is the impostume of much wealth and peace,
> That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
> Why the man dies.
> – Act 4, Scene 4, lines 26 to 28

The man mentioned here is analogous to the kingdom. He is diseased from too much prosperity and wealth.

Activity 3: Act 4, Scenes 5 and 6 – "When Sorrows Come"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

In Scene 5 the Queen is told about Ophelia, who has gone mad out of grief for her father. Claudius is also distressed because Laertes has returned to Denmark with a growing number of supporters who have implicated the King in his father's death. Laertes arrives demanding vengeance for his father's death. Claudius is able to calm him momentarily until Ophelia reenters. Laertes' grief increases at the sight of her.



Now read Scene 5; then respond to the following questions.

1. Ophelia's appearance and behaviour compare with Hamlet's in Act 2, Scene 1. In what ways is this true?

2. Ophelia's madness arouses in audiences a profound sense of **pathos**. Why is this?

Pathos: the quality that arouses in observers a sense of pity and compassion

3. Find a quotation from one of Ophelia's speeches in this scene that corresponds to each of the other themes on which she touches:

   a. sorrow
   b. evil
   c. unfaithfulness
   d. death

4. Claudius comments in lines 76-77 that "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, / But in battalias." What are the sorrows with which Claudius must cope?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 3.

Though Laertes entered this scene demanding vengeance, by the scene's end Claudius has managed to pacify him. He refuses to hide from Laertes, reminding him of the divine right of kings that protects him. Claudius wisely remains calm and allows Laertes to express his grievances. Afterward, Claudius invites Laertes to gather his friends around him to hear Claudius's side of the story. The King tells him that if he is at all implicated, then Laertes may have the crown.



Character Foils



Laertes and Hamlet now find themselves in parallel situations: both want revenge for murdered fathers. But are their circumstances identical?

5. Examine Laertes' speeches that follow and discuss how each one distinguishes him from Hamlet.

   a. To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!
   Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
   I dare damnation:
   – Act 4, Scene 5, lines 129 to 131

   b. his obscure burial,
   No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
   No noble rite, nor formal ostentation,
   Cry to be heard,
   – Act 4, Scene 5, lines 211 to 213

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 3.

Motifs

Corruption



Horatio reports that Ophelia hears there are strange dealings going on in Denmark: "… she hears / There's tricks i' the world" (lines 4 and 5). These "tricks" relate directly to the corruption in Denmark. Ophelia's ramblings and vulgar songs remind the audience of the state of the world.

The idea of poison is brought out again by Claudius when he exclaims that Ophelia's madness is "the poison of deep grief" (line 74). Ironically, Claudius is the source of this poison.



I noticed another example of poison. In line 88 Claudius says that Laertes "wants not buzzers to infect his ear." This must mean that the people are poisoning Laertes against the King.

Yeah, and Claudius is already worried about infected ears after literally pouring poison into King Hamlet's ear.





True enough. But, you can see that the poison that started with Claudius now pervades society. Claudius tells us in line 80 that the citizens are "Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers."

Right. Even Gertrude calls them "false Danish dogs" in line 108. I guess that means they're not "great Danes."





Yes, but you could say that Hamlet is a great Dane, in a dog-eat-dog world.

Oh, no. I'm surrounded.



Reading the Play

Setting the Scene

In Scene 6 sailors bring important correspondence to Horatio, who finds out that Hamlet has returned safely to Denmark while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have continued on to England.



Now read Scene 6 and respond to the Writing Folder suggestions that follow.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to **one** or **both** of the following.

a. Hamlet's terse and cryptic letter is significant for what it says and what it doesn't say. What additional information would you like to have from Hamlet?

b. Claudius seems capable of controlling Laertes, and Hamlet is safely out of the way in England, or so Claudius thinks. Hamlet's sudden return to Denmark will no doubt cause the King some consternation. In your folder, note your predictions for the next scene. What will Claudius do once he's apprised of this latest development. What will Laertes do?

Activity 4: Act 4, Scene 7 – "To Cut His Throat i' the Church"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

Laertes, convinced of Claudius's innocence, joins forces with him to contrive against Hamlet. Claudius uses flattery and guilt to manipulate Laertes into agreeing to a duel with Hamlet. Their plotting is interrupted by Gertrude, who brings them news of Ophelia's death.



Now read Scene 7; then respond to the following questions.

1. What excuses does Claudius give to Laertes for not having seized Hamlet?

2. Explain how Claudius uses flattery and guilt to steer Laertes into trapping Hamlet.



The scheme hatched by Claudius and Laertes to kill Hamlet seems a foolproof one. Claudius will arrange a duel between Hamlet and Laertes. Laertes will choose an "unbated" (unprotected) sword and kill Hamlet in combat. The King reckons that "no wind or blame shall breathe" (line 67) and even his mother will consider Hamlet's death an accident. Laertes immediately suggests that he "anoint [his] sword" with a poison so deadly that a mere scratch means death. Claudius considers further and then adds the final intrigue. Believing that a back-up plan is necessary, the King will put poison in a cup so that when Hamlet is "hot and dry" and calls for a drink, his doom will be sealed.

3. How does Claudius use Hamlet's good qualities against him in his scheme.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 4.

Character Foils



Laertes allows himself to become, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, a tool to be used by the King. Claudius exploits Laertes' feelings of guilt by asking him if he loved his father; he asks, "Laertes, was your father dear to you?" (line 108). Thus, Laertes is duped and manipulated by Claudius. Likewise, Hamlet has been manoeuvred into seeking revenge by his own father, who asked him "If thou didst ever thy dear father love" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 23). Both men become the agents of the real enemies – King Hamlet and his brother Claudius.

4. In spite of the similarity explained above, Laertes differs from Hamlet in some significant ways. When Claudius asks Laertes how he would show himself his "father's son in deed/ More than in words" (lines 126 and 127), Laertes quickly responds "To cut his throat i' the church" (line 128). How does this statement compare with Hamlet's attitudes about revenge?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 4.

On the topic of character foils, did you notice how, when speaking to Laertes, Claudius echoes some of Hamlet's own thoughts in his "To be, or not to be" soliloquy? Claudius contends that the spark of love diminishes over time. He also argues that one should act right away because if one waits, resolution changes and one ends up postponing the action. Claudius's ideas mimic Hamlet's musing in his soliloquy when Hamlet says, "and thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 85 and 86).

Motifs

Corruption



Claudius infects Laertes' ears with respect to Hamlet. Laertes has arrived in Denmark in pursuit of truth, but he is quickly swayed into a plot against Hamlet. He further shows his corruption by the devious means by which he will exact his revenge. His subterfuge with respect to his plot against Hamlet shows how Claudius has corrupted him.

Poison



Poison appears in the literal and figurative senses in this scene. Poison is present literally when Laertes decides to poison the tip of his sword. As well, when Claudius concludes that their plan "Should have a back or second" (line 154), he arranges to put poison in a cup for Hamlet to drink.

5. How is poison suggested figuratively in this scene?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 4.

Appearance and Reality



Claudius challenges Laertes to see if he truly feels internally what he's expressing externally: "Or are you like the painting of a sorrow, / A face without a heart?" (lines 108 and 109). Although Laertes protests loudly that he does feel just what he says he does, the audience continues to wonder if he "protests too much" (Act 3, Scene 2, line 226). Laertes seems in fact to care more about the quality of the funeral his father received than his actual death. In reality, Laertes is a "painting of a sorrow."

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following questions.

Ophelia's death is one of the most painful of the play. She's often portrayed as an innocent victim caught up in the whirlwind. The question is raised if her death were indeed an accident or suicide. Which side would you be on? What evidence would you quote to support your point of view? And here's something else to think about: wasn't Gertrude able to describe Ophelia's death in remarkable detail? Where was she when Ophelia died?



Activity 5: Act 5, Scene 1 – "Alas, Poor Yorick!"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

The scene begins with two gravediggers jesting with respect to Ophelia's death. Judging from their conversation, the common sentiment seems to be that Ophelia has killed herself and is allowed to be buried in sacred ground only because she's from a noble family. (At that time people who committed suicide weren't permitted Christian burials because suicide was believed to be against God's laws.) Hamlet and Horatio happen upon the gravediggers on their way to Elsinore. Hamlet stops to chat, which prompts him to meditate further on life and death.



Now read Scene 1 as far as line 209; then respond to the following question.

1. What reflections are aroused in Hamlet by the sight of Yorick's skull?

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 5.

Comic relief: a humorous scene designed to ease the tension in an otherwise serious play



The first part of this scene may be considered the only humorous part in the play. This type of humour is often referred to as ***comic relief****. Can you suggest why that is, Katrin?*



Sure. It's a way of reducing tension after a particularly dramatic scene. It seems to me that the audience needs a break from all the talk of poison and death. That way they're emotionally ready for the end of the play. Isn't that right?

Exactly. Many people use laughter as a way of relieving emotional tension. For example, I was once at a wedding when the bride started to laugh uncontrollably because she was so stressed. But let's also think about some of the grim jokes about death that are made in this scene and Hamlet's remarks on the inevitability of death. Is the audience really escaping the issues of life and death?



No way! I don't think Shakespeare wants us to forget what's on Hamlet's mind. In fact, doesn't this scene reinforce the theme of death in the play?

I'd agree. The scene may be humorous, but it reiterates Hamlet's preoccupation at the moment – facing his own death. The topics illustrated in this scene start to supersede the issue of revenge. Hamlet's struggle with his own mortality becomes the pivotal question of the play.



Motifs

Corruption



Hamlet is fixated on the decomposition of a body after death. In many ways this is a continuation of his discussion with Claudius in Act 4, Scene 3 about how "a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (lines 31 and 32). In this scene, Hamlet asks the gravedigger how long it takes for a body to rot, to which the gravedigger responds, "if a' be not rotten before a' die… he will last you some eight year or nine year" (lines 159 to 162). Hamlet's view of death, originally depicted as a release from a painful existence, has evolved into a reflection of corruption in Denmark. The "body politic" of Denmark is rotted, and Hamlet must cleanse the nation of this disease.

Appearance and Reality



Hamlet reveals again his revulsion at dissimulation (hiding behind a false impression) when examining Yorick's skull. He declares that his lady will ultimately suffer the same fate as Yorick even if she puts makeup on an inch thick: "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come" (lines 187 to 189).

Reading the Play

Setting the Scene

Hamlet's musings in Scene 1 are interrupted by the funeral procession. Only now does Hamlet discover Ophelia's fate. Laertes' histrionic actions and words ignite Hamlet's fury, and he proceeds to struggle with Laertes. The scene closes with Claudius reminding Laertes to be patient as their plan is about to come to fruition.



Now read to the end of the scene and respond to the following questions.

2. a. What is Laertes' main concern regarding the burial of his sister?

   b. How does this reinforce the perception of Laertes created in Act 4?

3. How do you account for Hamlet's leaping into the grave and getting involved in a struggle with Laertes?

Compare your responses with the ones in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 5.



Activity 6: Act 5, Scene 2 – "The Rest Is Silence"

Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

In the first part of this scene Hamlet shares all the facts with Horatio regarding his escape from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Osric, a courtier, informs Hamlet of Laertes' challenge. Although Hamlet is dubious, he decides to accept the challenge.



Now read Scene 2 as far as line 215; then respond to the following questions.

1. What details do you learn in this part of Scene 2 about the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?

2. How and why does Hamlet mock Osric?

In this scene Hamlet makes three significant references to his life's being under the direction of a power from heaven. First, he tells Horatio that "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (lines 10 and 11). He's saying here that his life is controlled by a destiny no matter what he does. Hamlet alludes to this theme again when answering Horatio's query about how he sealed the letter. Hamlet responds by saying he had his father's signet with him which was "heaven ordinant" (line 48). He means that heaven was guiding his actions and that's why he just happened to have the seal with him. Hamlet later comments that "there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (lines 210 and 211). Once again Hamlet is revealing his belief that nothing happens on earth without God's knowledge. In other words, it's God's plan that he's fulfilling.

3. Explain how Hamlet's references are consistent with Elizabethan cosmology. (You may wish to refer back to Activity 6 in Section 1: The Elizabethan Worldview.)

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 6.

Motifs

Poison



In this scene Hamlet again refers to Claudius as the source of poison in Denmark. In line 69 Hamlet alludes to Claudius as the "canker of our nature" – a spreading sore.



Can you think of any other examples of poison in the first part of this scene?

Well, I'm reminded of what the Ghost said to Hamlet about not tainting his own mind. Could you say that Hamlet is "poisoned" by having Rosencrantz and Guildenstern killed? I mean, isn't it murder?



I see what you mean. You're saying that Hamlet didn't have to have them killed. He could simply have rewritten the letter so he wouldn't be decapitated. It's interesting to note Horatio's response: "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't." Horatio seems distressed by this news of their death.

I really disagree with you guys. I think that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern deserved their fate. You're forgetting that they went out of their way to plot against Hamlet. Hamlet reminds us of that when he says – let's see… OK, here it is, line 57: "they did make love to this employment." They were taking Hamlet to his own death.





For me it all hinges on whether or not Hamlet knew the pirate ship would rescue him. I guess if he didn't know, you could argue it was self-defence. If he did, though, I think their deaths are on his head.

Well, whatever your point of view, Hamlet tells us in line 58 that they "are not near [his] conscience." He believes that their deaths, like Polonius's, were a result of their own meddling.



Death

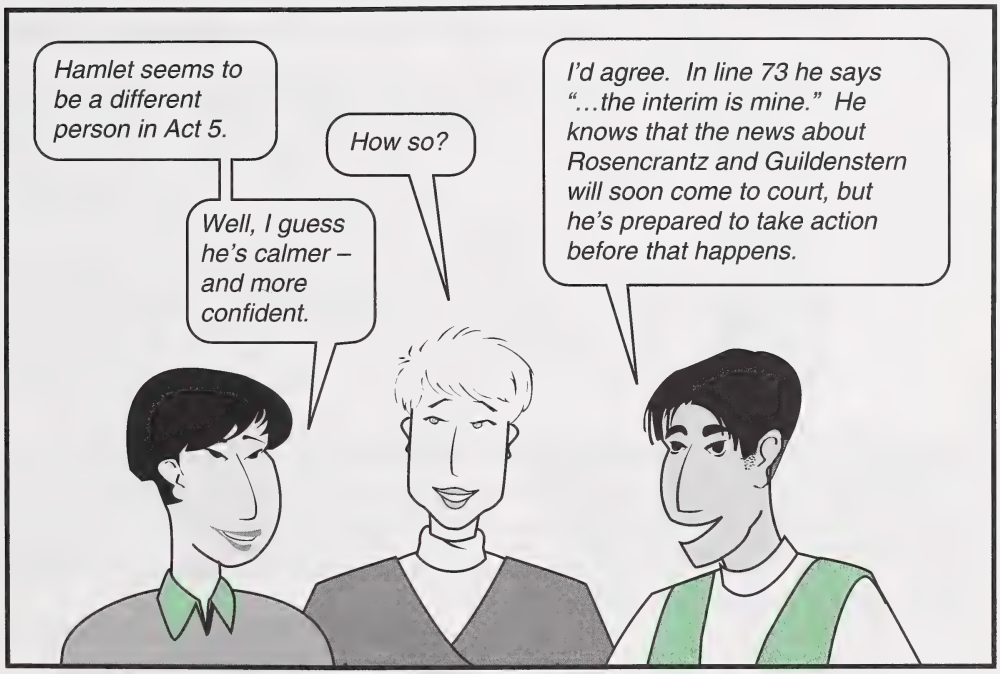


In many ways Hamlet's preoccupation with death reaches its climax in this scene. Through the play you've witnessed an evolution in Hamlet's thinking. Originally, death was perceived as a potential release from earthly pain and suffering. In fact, Hamlet wonders why more people don't commit suicide. By Act 4, Hamlet envisions death as a corruption of the body. He focuses on decaying flesh. By Act 5, however, he's come to an acceptance of death. In the speech beginning with, "If it be now…" (lines 211 to 215) Hamlet realizes that death comes to everyone; it's an inescapable part of life. This speech reveals his acceptance of his fate and the inevitability of his own death. This man who earlier did "not set [his] life at a pin's fee" (Act 1, Scene 4, line 65) now accepts that fulfilling his role as an avenger also means being prepared to die when it's his turn. Like a true Elizabethan, Hamlet finally accepts that all is pre-ordained and that he's a cog in the wheel of life. His statement that "the readiness is all" (Act 5, Scene 2, line 213) tells you that he now believes that an early death isn't terrible because one won't know what one is leaving behind. Even though his mind "misgives" regarding the duel with Laertes, he defies augury. As Hamlet tells you, "The interim is mine" (line 73).

Character Foils



In this scene Hamlet confides to Horatio that he regrets his outburst to Laertes at Ophelia's funeral, for Hamlet sees reflected in Laertes his own cause: "For by the image of my cause, I see / The portraiture of his" (lines 77 and 78). Hamlet recognizes that Laertes must avenge his father's death. Even the speech in which Hamlet resigns himself to his fate is reminiscent of Laertes' line "Let come what comes" in Act 4, Scene 5 (line 133).



Reading the Play



Setting the Scene

In the second part of Scene 2 Claudius prepares a chalice into which he puts poison. He tells everyone that it's a valuable pearl. During the duel Gertrude decides to drink to Hamlet's success, but she chooses the poisoned cup. Laertes manages to injure Hamlet with his "unbated and envenom'd" sword. The swords are exchanged in a scuffle, and Hamlet kills Laertes. The Queen also dies but not before she reveals that she was poisoned. Laertes confesses his part in the conspiracy and identifies the King as the one to blame. Hamlet stabs Claudius and then pours the poisoned drink down his throat. Before Hamlet dies, with his "dying voice" he approves Fortinbras as the one to succeed him in Denmark.



Now read to the end of the play; then respond to the following questions.

4. During the sword fight Laertes begins to have second thoughts about killing Hamlet. How does Hamlet inadvertently rekindle his resolve?

5. Why doesn't Claudius save Gertrude before she drinks from the poisoned cup?

6. How and why does Hamlet insist on poisoning Claudius twice?

7. Why is it important that the play not end with the death of Hamlet?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 6.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder write a short **eulogy** that Horatio might give as a tribute to Hamlet at his funeral.

Eulogy: a speech that praises a person

Motifs

Poison



The motif of poison is very much present in the latter part of Scene 2. Every major character with the exception of Horatio is killed by poison. They are all poisoned figuratively by Claudius – "the serpent" – and now they are poisoned literally by his treachery.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder give your ideas on how successfully Hamlet was able to follow the Ghost's instructions to seek revenge but not to taint his mind.



Activity 7: Tragedy and the Tragic Hero

Structure of the Shakespearean Tragedy

Hamlet is an example of the type of play known as a *tragedy* – a term that will be discussed later in this activity. Every Shakespearean tragedy is divided into five acts and contains the following seven stages:

Stage 1: Exposition

Initial incident: the event that gets the plot of a work of literature going

Antecedent action: events relating to a work of literature but which occurred before the action begins

The exposition presents certain information to the audience, such as the setting (time and place), the relationship of characters, and the general mood of the play. The exposition ends with the **initial incident**, which is the first incident to start the plot going. The exposition may also convey information about **antecedent action** – action that has gone on before the play begins and which has some connection with the play itself. Shakespeare always uses part of the first act to give the audience whatever background information they need in order to understand the conflict that will constitute the plot. This information also prepares the audience for what's to come and sets the tone of the entire play. This is done through the dialogue and actions of the characters on the stage.

Stage 2: Complication

Complication: the part of the plot in a work of literature in which the conflict gets going and begins to develop

The part of a tragedy called the **complication** is the part that begins the action and creates suspense and interest in what's going to follow. Thus, the complication begins the major conflict of the play.



Stage 3: Rising Action

Rising action: the series of events leading to the climax of a work of literature

The series of events that lead up to the climax of the play composes the **rising action**. In this part of the Shakespearean tragedy, the protagonist is winning the struggle to achieve his or her objective despite opposition, either external or internal.

Stage 4: Climax

Crisis: the climax or, more precisely, the situation that brings about the climax, in a work of literature

The climax (or **crisis**, or turning point) is the point of highest interest in the plot. Events from the start of the play follow one another in a cause-and-effect relationship until the point of highest interest is reached. This is also the turning point in the Shakespearean plot – the scene in which the protagonist suffers his or her first major reverse. This climax is so great that it strongly foreshadows to the audience the hero's ultimate downfall.

Stage 5: Falling Action

Falling action: that part of a tragedy in which the fortunes of the protagonist are in decline

The **falling action** depicts the protagonist's declining fortunes as he or she suffers one reverse after another. In order to maintain suspense, there's usually delaying action such as a quarrel; but the audience can see that the protagonist is quickly moving to ultimate defeat and catastrophe.

Stage 6: Catastrophe

Catastrophe: the point in a tragedy where disaster strikes and the protagonist dies

When the **catastrophe** is reached, the protagonist experiences the consequences of his or her previous actions – his or her own death.

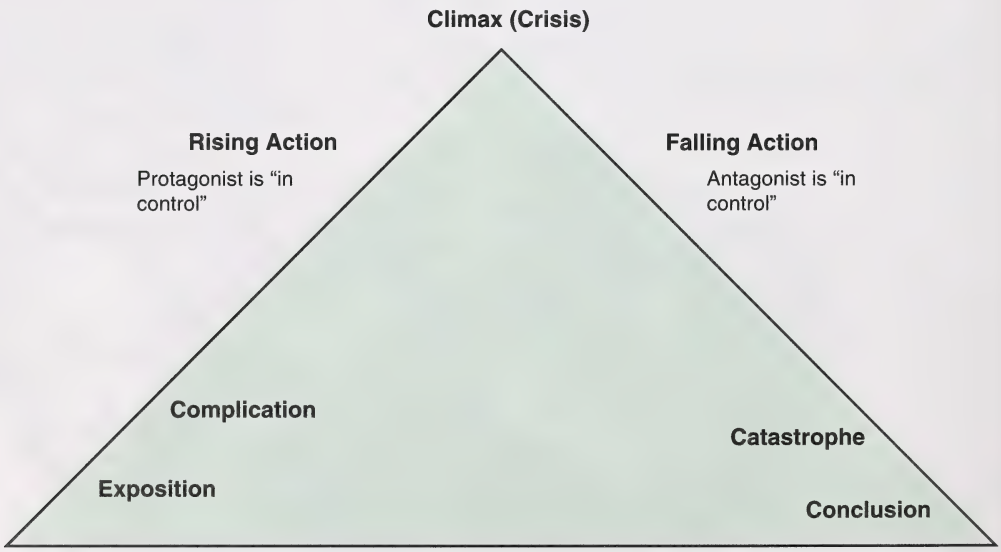
Stage 7: Conclusion

Conclusion: in a tragedy, the short scene at the end that foreshadows what will happen now that the protagonist is dead

The **conclusion** is made up of the short scene after the death of the protagonist which foreshadows the events that are likely to follow now that the protagonist is dead.

The German critic Gustave Freytag, in his *Technique of the Drama* (1863), using Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a model, created a pyramid shape representing the "typical" plot structure of the classical and Shakespearean five-act play. It provided a structural concept that's adapted today to everything from novels to short stories. (In Module 2 you saw an adaptation of his model in the discussion of plot structures in short stories.)

Plot Structure of a Shakespearean Tragedy



1. Following is a list of various events in *Hamlet* from the exposition to the turning point in Act 3. Put these events in chronological order by numbering them 1 to 10.

   a. _____ Claudius tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet.

b. _____ The Ghost appears in full combat attire.

c. _____ Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius while he's at prayer.

d. _____ Hamlet meets with the players.

e. _____ The Ghost tells Hamlet to avenge "his foul and most unnatural murder."

f. _____ Hamlet says to Ophelia, "Get thee to a nunnery."

g. _____ Hamlet says, "O, that this too too-solid flesh would melt."

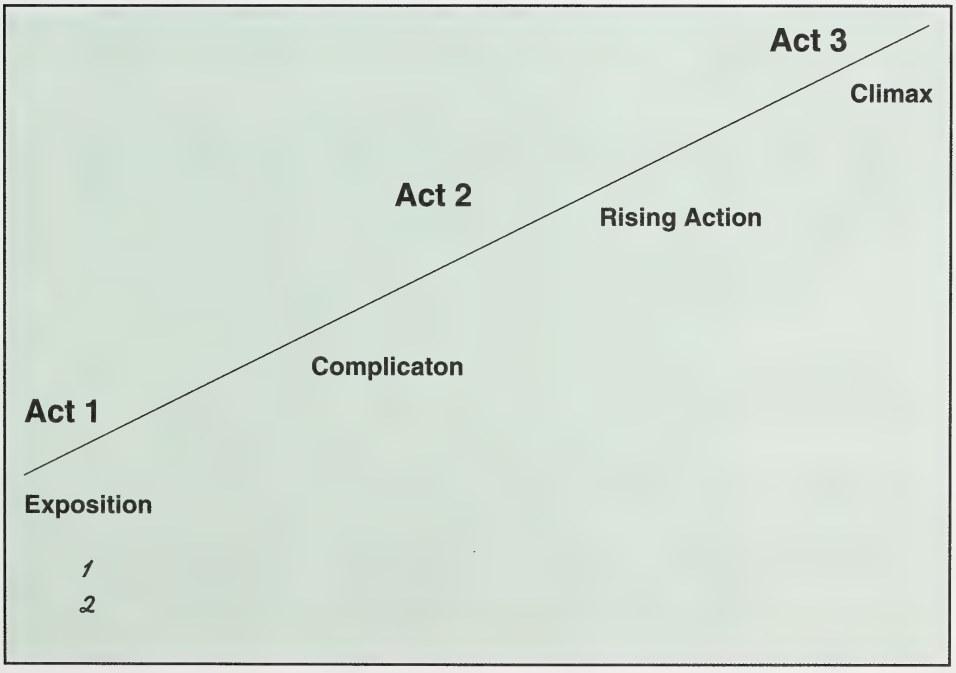
h. _____ Polonius concludes that Hamlet is mad out of love for his daughter.

i. _____ Claudius reacts to the "mousetrap."

j. _____ Polonius advises his son, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be."

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 7.

2. Now using the numbers from your answers to question 1, make a chart like the one that follows and arrange the events where they belong. The chart has been started to get you going.



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 7.

3. Listed here are various events in *Hamlet* from the turning point in Act 3 to the conclusion. Put these events in chronological order as you did in question 1, using the numbers 11 to 20.

   a. _____ Hamlet stabs Polonius.

   b. _____ Hamlet holds Yorick's skull.

   c. _____ Laertes and Gertrude die.

   d. _____ Fortinbras recalls "some rights of memory in this kingdom."

   e. _____ Claudius tells Hamlet he is to be sent to England.

   f. _____ Ophelia dies.

   g. _____ Hamlet and Claudius die.

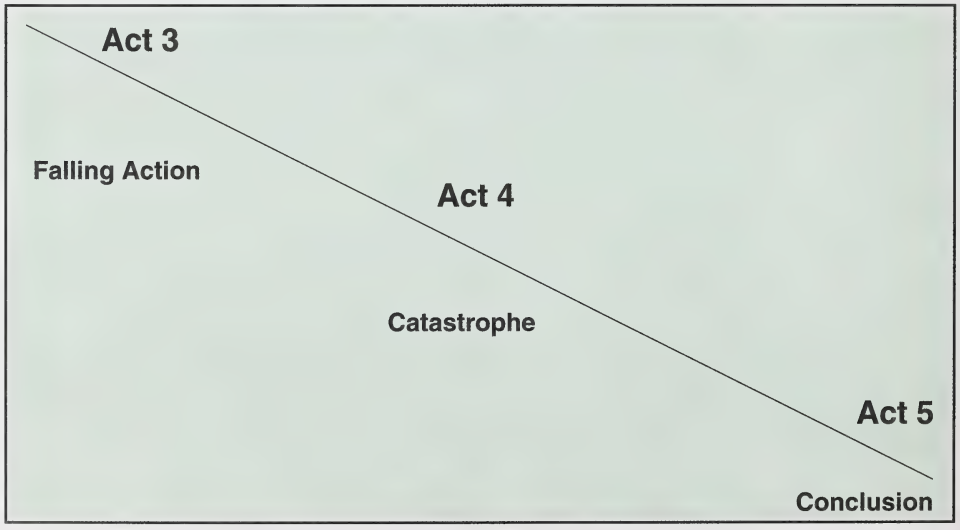
   h. _____ Claudius and Laertes plan Hamlet's death.

   i. _____ Hamlet delivers his last soliloquy.

   j. _____ The Ghost appears to "whet" Hamlet's "almost blunted purpose."

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 7.

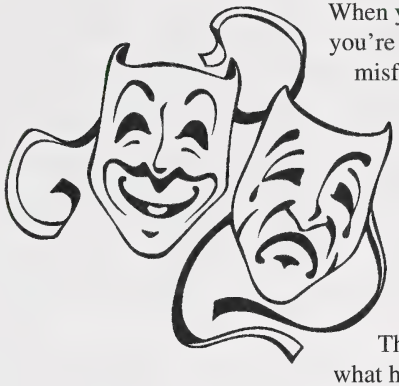
4. Now using your answers to question 3, make another chart and place the events in the appropriate places.



Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Activity 7.

The Meaning of *Tragedy*

Tragedy: a dramatic work in which a noble protagonist suffers personal destruction, usually because of a fatal flaw in his or her character



When you hear the word **tragedy**, what do you think of? If you're like most people, you think of sad, unhappy events – misfortunes that ruin people's lives. In the field of drama, however, a distinction has to be drawn between tragic events and occurrences that are simply pathetic. If something dreadful happens to someone because of forces outside that person's control (for example, if a drunk driver smashes into his or her car), it can be said to be pathetic, but not technically tragic. A tragic event, by contrast, depends on a relationship between people's behaviour and the events that happen to them. Thus, tragic "heroes" must in some way be responsible for what happens to them; their downfalls must somehow result from their actions – at least in part.

Of course a tragedy in this technical sense isn't entirely divorced from the way people ordinarily use the word. Plays that can be classified as tragedies all involve unfortunate events befalling their protagonists – events that destroy their lives and which usually result in their deaths. Great tragedies, however, don't depress their audiences the way simply pathetic occurrences likely would; though they involve sadness and suffering, tragedies should always uplift those who witness them and leave them feeling somehow cleansed and refreshed.

Catharsis: the purification of the emotions by way of release and renewal

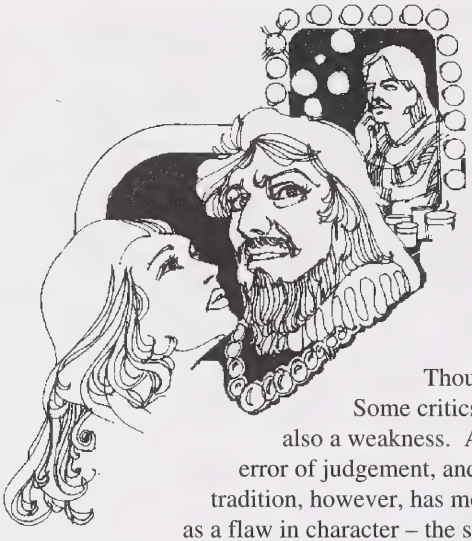


This notion of what a tragedy is goes back to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived from 384 to 322 B.C. In his work the *Poetics*, Aristotle argued that tragedy is a type of drama that deals with events arousing pity and fear but which at the same time brings about a **catharsis** of these emotions. In other words, the audience watching a drama should experience an emotional release as well as a sense of spiritual uplifting. Indeed, many people, after sitting through an intense production of a tragedy such as *Hamlet*, leave the theatre feeling exhilarated and somehow purified; and along with this there goes a gain in wisdom – the sense that through watching the destruction of a noble soul, increased self-awareness and understanding have been gained. There is, of course, the sense of sadness and regret you might expect over the waste of human potential; but through this, a greater understanding of the human condition should have been achieved.

According to Aristotle, the protagonists of tragedies should be people of exceptional ability – and usually of noble rank within society. But more importantly, tragic heroes should possess nobility of soul. Tragic heroes should be people capable of much, but because of some flaw in themselves – and this might be something as slight as an error in judgement – their lives are brought from the heights down to the depths, from happiness down to misery.

The Tragic Hero

Tragic hero: the protagonist of a tragedy



The term **tragic hero** implies two separate concepts: tragedy and heroism. Tragic heroes must be people of noble stature. They have a greatness about them. They aren't ordinary people but individuals of outstanding qualities. In Greek and in Shakespearean tragedy, they're usually princes or kings. But they're great not simply because of their positions but because of their possession of extraordinary abilities – qualities of passion or aspiration or nobility of mind.

Though tragic heroes are great, they aren't perfect. Some critics believe that combined with their strength, there is also a weakness. Aristotle says that their falls are caused by some error of judgement, and probably he meant no more than that. Critical tradition, however, has most frequently interpreted this error of judgement as a flaw in character – the so-called **tragic flaw**. With all their great qualities, tragic heroes, some critics maintain, are afflicted with some fault of character such as inordinate ambition, a quickness to anger, a tendency to jealousy, or overweening pride. This flaw in their characters leads to their downfall. Other critics discount the tragic flaw theory as being inadequate. They prefer the idea of heroic excess. In this sense, it is the heroes' good qualities that undo them.

Tragic flaw: the shortcoming in the character of a tragic hero that leads to his or her destruction



Nevertheless, the misfortunes of tragic heroes aren't wholly deserved. The punishments exceed the crimes. The audience doesn't come away from a real tragedy with the feeling that "He got what he had coming to him" but rather with the sense of a waste of human potential. For what most impresses us about tragic heroes isn't their weakness but their greatness. They are, in a sense, "larger than life," or as Aristotle said, "better than ourselves." They reveal to us the dimensions of human possibility. They are people who are for the most part admirable, and their falls therefore fill us with regret and fear.

Yet such tragic falls aren't pure loss. Though they may result in the protagonists' deaths, they involve, before their deaths, some increase in awareness, some gain in self-knowledge – as Aristotle puts it, some "discovery" – a change from ignorance to knowledge. On the level of plot, the discovery may be merely learning the truth about some fact or situation of which the protagonist was ignorant, but on the level of character it's an increase not only in knowledge but in wisdom. This increase in wisdom usually involves some sort of reconciliation with the universe or with the protagonist's situation. Tragic heroes exit not cursing their fate but accepting it and acknowledging that it's to some degree just.

Hamlet, the Tragic Hero

Hamlet is a reluctant hero. In his first soliloquy he tells the audience that his uncle is no more like his father than he himself is like Hercules. And by the end of Act 1 Hamlet is lamenting that it's his responsibility to set things right. Think back to the discussion about heroes in the Extra Help for Section 2. A hero is willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to do what's right. A protagonist who fights for justice and wins is a hero. One who fights but in the process dies is a tragic hero. Before Hamlet can be a tragic hero, he must accept his role as an avenger – something he's reluctant to do. Why? The answer to this question strikes at the heart of the mystery of Hamlet's character. Even Hamlet doesn't know "Why yet I live to say, this thing's to do" (Act 4, Scene 4, line 43).



Ms. Jensen: Why do you think Hamlet delays? Is he too much of a scholar? Is the idea of killing too offensive to him?

Wes: I don't think so. I mean, when the Ghost appears, Hamlet threatens to kill any of his friends who try to stop him from speaking to it. That shows he's not exactly wimpy.

Katrin: And, you've also got to consider that by the end of the play he's killed Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes, and Claudius. Not exactly Mr. Rogers!

Ms. Jensen: You both raise excellent points. But can you think of any alternative theories.

Aaron: It's hard to explain, but it seems to me that Hamlet is sort of out of balance or harmony with the world. His actions don't match his internal feelings. He's really motivated to act... but he doesn't. It's just like when he was talking with the actors. He's got to suit his actions to his words, as he says himself.

Sue: Hamlet's not the only one with this problem. Laertes and Fortinbras have the opposite difficulty. They're not highly motivated, but they act impulsively.

Ms. Jensen: I think you're getting close to the central issue here. Hamlet's situation calls for decisive action. He should kill Claudius the first chance he gets, but he doesn't. The reason seems clear. The thing that makes him a great human being also weakens him in this situation. He's a thinker, a philosopher. That's his downfall in a sense. But Hamlet tells us that God didn't give us our faculty of reason to "fust" in us unused. He believes that thinking is necessary preparation for action, at least for appropriate action. When Hamlet does act impulsively in the play, he makes a crucial mistake: he kills Polonius, and this act propels him to his doom.

Wes: But he also says conscience makes cowards of us all. I think I get it. Because of Hamlet's nature, he has to think before he acts, but the more he thinks, the less active he gets.

Sue: Personally I think Hamlet's problem has more to do with the fact that he lives in a corrupt world, and perhaps killing his uncle – a deed that can't be considered noble – would be repulsive to him. Hamlet is a noble human being who has to defile himself in order to cleanse Denmark. And in the end, Hamlet pays for his crimes too.



WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to **one** or **both** of the following ideas.

1. What are your ideas on the tragedy that befell Hamlet? In your response consider questions like these:

   - Why did Hamlet delay so much?
   - Did Hamlet have a "tragic flaw" that accounted for his destruction?
   - Was Hamlet just a procrastinator?
   - Did Hamlet postpone his revenge out of weakness or out of strength?

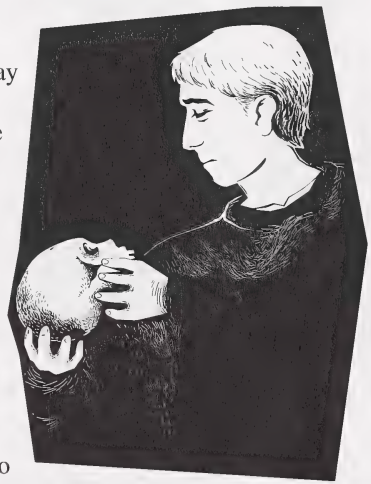
2. Reread your response to the Writing Folder suggestion in Section 1: Activity 1. How do you feel about reading the play now? Was it easier or more difficult than you thought it would be?

Follow-up Activities

If you found the activities difficult, you should complete the Extra Help. If you understand the concepts clearly, you should complete the Enrichment.

Extra Help

Hamlet's Delay



Arguably the greatest problem of the play *Hamlet* is why Hamlet didn't "sweep to [his] revenge" as he promised to do when he first heard the Ghost's story. His hesitation and delay form the central thread of the plot and are responsible for the deaths of several people, including himself. Why then did he delay?

Five main theories have been advanced to explain this problem; following is a brief outline of these theories.

Theory #1

Some people argue that Hamlet delayed because of external obstacles. For example, they contend that killing the King, who was guarded by Swiss soldiers, would have been difficult. Also, they say that Hamlet was waiting to be able to prove that he had acted justly. His difficulties would be further complicated by his own feigned madness and by his desire to conceal his mother's part in the plot. Thus, it may be argued that Hamlet was faced with practical difficulties in getting his revenge.

1. What evidence could you raise to counter the preceding arguments?

Theory #2

A second theory is that Hamlet was deterred by conscientious scruples: he simply couldn't persuade himself that it was right to commit murder even to avenge his father. Since there's no direct evidence for assuming this, the proponents of this view suggest that he was under an unconscious restraint – that his moral nature rebelled against killing although he himself did not realize why he hesitated.

2. What evidence could you raise to counter this argument?

Theory #3

The German writer and critic Goethe proposed that Hamlet wasn't a strong enough person to act out the revenge required of him. This is referred to as the "sentimental theory of Hamlet." Goethe maintained that Hamlet had a pure moral nature but lacked the nerve that makes a hero.

3. What evidence might you raise to counter this idea?

Theory #4

The English writer Coleridge found his key to Hamlet's character in the lines "And thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 85 and 86). This is one of the most popular theories: that Hamlet meditated when he ought to have acted; that he was primarily a philosopher who was out of touch with the practical world and incapable of meeting real situations.

4. What evidence could you produce to counter Coleridge's theory?

Theory #5

Another popular and well-supported argument is put forth by the English thinker Bradley. His theory stresses the point that the Hamlet who is called upon to avenge his father's death is in an abnormal condition – that if he had been his normal self he could have acted, but that from the beginning of the play he's in an abnormal state – a state of profound melancholy. According to this theory, the thing that's required of Hamlet isn't impossible for him: it's impossible for him only under the particular circumstances of the play. Under extreme shock, this theory goes, a character such as Hamlet might be so damaged that a task that formerly would have been easily accomplished might well be beyond his power.

5. What is your theory about Hamlet's delay? Why do you think Hamlet failed to "sweep to [his] revenge"?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Extra Help.

The Motifs in *Hamlet*

The motifs in *Hamlet* are made up of images that recur throughout the play and which reinforce the play's basic themes and ideas. The two most significant motifs deal with corruption and the contrast between appearance and reality. At this point it might be helpful to reexamine these two motifs and discuss their significance in relation to the entire play.

Corruption ("Something is rotten in the state of Denmark")



The idea of corruption pervades the play in various forms. The underlying meaning here is that the king is closely identified with the state. If a king were corrupt, so too was the state. The wrong person on the throne could result in chaos in the country; this chaos could take the form of plagues, epidemics, threats of war from other states, or civil war. For order to be restored, the rightful heir must assume the role of ruler.

In *Hamlet*, Claudius has corrupted Denmark by his murder of the rightful king and by his incestuous marriage to Gertrude. The rottenness in Denmark has poisoned the minds and souls of its citizens and even of Hamlet himself. This idea of a corrupt kingdom is reinforced many times in the play by various references to poison, diseases, body blemishes, and rotting foods and plants.

Since Hamlet is the lens through which you see Denmark, it's appropriate to consider the images he uses to describe his world.

6. Examine each of Hamlet's speeches that follow. Provide the context for each of the quotations and then comment on its meaning.



   a. "…'tis an unweeded garden, / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely." (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 135 to 137)

   b. "That for some vicious mole of nature in them" (Act 1, Scene 4, line 24)

   c. "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being / a god kissing carrion" (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 179 and 180)

   d. "… the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory;… it appears no other thing to me than a foul pestilent congregation of vapours." (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 298 to 303)

   e. "And thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 85 and 86)

   f. "And sets a blister there" (Act 3, Scene 4, line 46) This comment refers to Hamlet's mother's marriage.

   g. "Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear" (Act 3, Scene 4, line 66)

   h. "Nay, but to live / In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, / Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty—" (Act 3, Scene 4, lines 94 to 96)

   i. "It will but skin and film the ulcerous place, / While rank corruption, mining all within, / Infects unseen." (Act 3, Scene 4, lines 149 to 151)

   j. "… and my two schoolfellows, / Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd," (Act 3, Scene 4, lines 204 and 205)

   k. "This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace," (Act 4, Scene 4, line 26)

   l. "How long will a man lie i' the earth ere he rot?" (Act 5, Scene 1, line 158) Discuss this line in the context of entire graveyard scene.

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Extra Help.

Hamlet is himself infected by the corruption in Denmark. He loses his belief in people and in himself. His "antic disposition" is a display of mental disease. He acts as though he were poisoned. Of course Hamlet isn't the only character who makes reference to corruption in Denmark. The imagery Hamlet uses is echoed by other characters in the play.

7. Examine each of the speeches that follow made by various other characters. Provide the context for each of the quotations and then comment on its meaning.

   a. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." (Act 1, Scene 4, line 90)
   – Marcellus

   b. "This bodes some strange eruption to our state." (Act 1, Scene 1, line 69)
   – Horatio

   c. "The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown." (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 39 and 40)
   – The Ghost

   d. "With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial, / And in the porches of mine ears did pour / The leperous distilment" (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 63 to 65)
   – The Ghost

   e. "The canker galls the infants of the spring" (Act 1, Scene 3, line 39)
   – Laertes

   f. "But, like the owner of a foul disease, / To keep it from divulging, let it feed / Even on the pith of life." (Act 4, Scene 1, lines 21 to 23)
   – Claudius

   g. "… diseases desperate grown / By desperate applicance are relieved, / Or not at all." (Act 4, Scene 3, lines 9 to 11)
   – Claudius

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Extra Help.

Appearance and Reality



People and things aren't always what they appear to be. Truth can be hidden under deceptive surfaces. Everyone in *Hamlet* is playing a role that disguises to a lesser or greater degree his or her real character. This motif appears in three forms:

- clothes
- cosmetics
- acting

8. Examine each of the speeches that follow made by various characters. Provide the context for each of the quotations and then comment on its meaning.

   a. Clothes:

      1) " 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother" (Act 1, Scene 2, line 77)
      – Hamlet

2) "… doublet all unbraced, / … stockings foul'd, / Ungarter'd" (Act 2, Scene 1, lines 79 to 81)

– Ophelia

3) "For the apparel oft proclaims the man;" (Act 1, Scene 3, line 72)

– Polonius

b. Cosmetics:

1) "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another;" (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 143 to 145)

– Hamlet

2) "… let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come;" (Act 5, Scene 1, lines 188 and 189)

– Hamlet

3) "… beautied with plastering art" (Act 3, Scene 1, line 52)

– Claudius

c. Acting:

1) "And pious action, we do sugar o'er / The devil himself" (Act 3, Scene 1, lines 48 and 49)

– Polonius

2) "Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not 'seems'." (Act 1, Scene 2, line 76)

– Hamlet

3) "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 109)

– Hamlet

4) "Or are you like the painting of a sorrow" (Act 4, Scene 7, line 108)

– Claudius

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Extra Help.

Character Foils in *Hamlet*



At the heart of character foils is contrast. White appears more white when set against black. Virtue is more clearly visible when juxtaposed with evil. Likewise, Hamlet is more understandable when compared with the other major characters in the play. Usually character foils are similar in some way but at the same time strongly dissimilar in perhaps temperament or intelligence. It is this contrast that helps you to understand the main character.

In *Hamlet* the protagonist has several character foils. In particular, he's contrasted with three other young men:

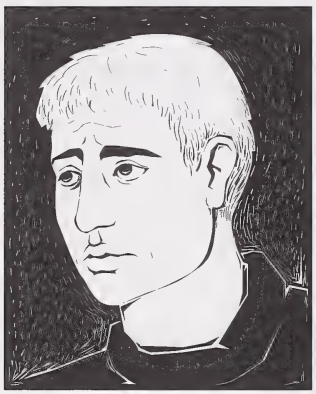
- Horatio
- Fortinbras
- Laertes

Hamlet and Horatio

It's said that friends often recognize and admire qualities in each other because they lack those qualities themselves. This appears to be true of Hamlet and Horatio. Horatio is, like Hamlet, scholarly and philosophic. But why does Hamlet admire and trust him and keep him in his "heart of heart" (Act 3, Scene 2, line 72)? Hamlet himself provides the answer. He admires Horatio's ability to maintain an even temper. Horatio isn't impulsive; therefore, he's not a victim of chance.

9. What do you learn about Hamlet by comparing him to Horatio?

Hamlet



Horatio



Fortinbras



Laertes



Hamlet and Fortinbras

Fortinbras is a courageous, soldierly young man of action. Hamlet envies Fortinbras for his ability to lead and take action. However, Fortinbras seems to be hot headed. He raises an army against Denmark but is persuaded by his uncle to lead an expedition against Poland. Ostensibly, Fortinbras wants revenge for his dead father, but he ends up fighting for a worthless piece of ground.

10. What do you learn about Hamlet by comparing him to Fortinbras?

Hamlet and Laertes

Laertes' situation most closely parallels Hamlet's. Laertes has had a father killed and has a sister who has gone mad, and he blames Hamlet. Both young men have returned to Elsinore for the coronation and both want to return to their respective schools. But Laertes doesn't seem as devoted to Polonius as Hamlet is to his father. Laertes is given to exaggeration. His grief at Ophelia's funeral is overstated, and this detracts from the sincerity of his feelings. As well, he very quickly agrees to plot against Hamlet with Claudius. Laertes' revenge is underhanded; he's willing to poison his rapier.

11. What do you learn about Hamlet by comparing him to Laertes?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Extra help.

For Hamlet, Horatio represents the ideal because there is a harmony and balance within him. His actions are proportionate to his thoughts. Hamlet, Fortinbras, and Laertes, on the other hand, are all imbalanced. Their actions are not proportionate to their feelings. This is illustrated in the chart that follows.

Hamlet	Horatio	Laertes and Fortinbras
He is highly motivated to act and to seek revenge but fails to act when he can.	He represents a balance between word and deed, reason and emotion.	Both act impetuously by pursuing vigourous action when none is justified.

Enrichment

Do **one** or **more** of the following.

Hamlet Trivia



1. How good is your memory? Put it to the test by trying to identify as many as possible of the speakers of the quotations that follow. To push yourself a little harder, try to remember the person to whom the speech was addressed! Don't peek at the answers until you've tried them all.

   a. "But I have that within that passeth show; / These, but the trappings and the suits of woe."

   b. "… I might not this believe, / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes."

   c. "This above all: to thine own self be true"

   d. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."

   e. "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;"

f. "… There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow."

g. "As I perchance hereafter may think meet / To put an antic disposition on"

h. "Mad for thy love!"

i. "Yet must not we put the strong law on him: / He's loved of the distracted multitude"

j. "Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go."

k. "Never alone / Did the king sigh, but with a general groan."

l. "No place indeed should murder sanctuarize; / Revenge should have no bounds."

m. "… and blessed are those / Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled"

n. "… brevity is the soul of wit"

o. "And where the offence is let the great axe fall."

p. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will."

q. "… honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty–"

r. "Not where he eats, but where he is eaten:"

s. "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all"

t. "It hath the primal eldest curse upon't"

u. "… but in my terms of honour / I stand aloof, and will no reconcilement"

v. "… the readiness is all:"

w. "O heat, dry up my brains!"

x. "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!"

y. "Get thee to a nunnery."

z. "I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:"

a.a. "For by the image of my cause, I see / The protraiture of his:"

b.b. "They are not near my conscience;"

c.c. "What ceremony else?"

d.d. "… and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come;"

e.e. "Exposing what is mortal and unsure… / Even for an egg-shell."

f.f. "This is the very coinage of your brain: / This bodiless creation ecstasy…"

g.g. "… this visitation / Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose."

h.h. "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba…"

i.i. "… like a mildew'd ear,…"

j.j. "… but 'tis not so above: / There is no shuffling,…"

k.k. "… 'tis an unweeded garden, / That grows to seed;"

l.l. "… 'tis a fault to heaven, / A fault against the dead, a fault to nature"

m.m. "He may not, as unvalued persons do, / Carve for himself,…"

n.n. "But that I am forbid / To tell the secrets of my prison-house"

o.o. "O most pernicious woman!"

p.p. "… when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw."

q.q. "Love! his affections do not that way tend;"

r.r. "The rest is silence."

s.s. "Why as a woodcock to mine own springe,…"

t.t. "Ay, springes to catch woodcocks."

u.u. "… was your father dear to you? / Or are you like the painting of a sorrow"

v.v. "Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger."

w.w. "… his soul may be as damn'd and black / As hell whereto it goes."

x.x. "It warms the very sickness in my heart, / That I shall live and tell him to his teeth, / 'Thus diddest thou!' "

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Enrichment.

From a Woman's Point of View

Has it struck you that while in *Hamlet* the protagonist frequently has occasion to explain his thoughts directly to the audience, this opportunity is for the most part denied other characters. The two female roles – Gertrude and Ophelia – in particular have little chance to explain their points of view.

WRITING FOLDER

In your Writing Folder respond to the following:

Write a soliloquy of at least thirty lines for either Gertrude or Ophelia. First decide what ideas and feelings your selected character would likely wish to express and try to select imagery that would help unfold her feelings. Be sure to indicate where in the play the speech would be delivered. Then set to work and write your soliloquy.

Hamlet On Trial

Was there a method to his madness? Is Hamlet guilty of murder? The following article taken from *The Edmonton Journal* recounts for you the highlights of a mock trial presided over by top-notch lawyers in the United States.

2. Read the article " 'Brilliant' Hamlet Convicted 10–2" and then answer the questions that follow.

'Brilliant' Hamlet Convicted 10–2[1]

There was method to his madness.

At least that's what a majority of Hamlet's jury decided.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy presided as top lawyers and doctors gathered to put Shakespeare's melancholy Dane on trial for murder.

Chicago lawyers George Cotsirilos and James Montgomery led the defence, arguing that the prince was clinically depressed and hallucinating when he killed Polonius, who says in the play: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't."

The prosecution, led by Cook County board president Richard Phelan and William Bauer, former chief judge of the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, argued Hamlet was a brilliant tactician plotting to avenge his father's murder.

Almost 700 people paid $200 US each to attend the sold-out trial Saturday night at the Art Institute of Chicago. The event was part of the fifth annual Chicago Humanities Festival, and the money will be used to subsidize other festival events. Kennedy, who devised the idea to put Hamlet on trial, said he intended the show to be educational.

Lawyers presented opening statements, questioned two expert witnesses and gave closing arguments before a jury of local government officials and intellectuals.

The jury ruled 10–2 that Hamlet was sane and, thus, responsible for his actions.

The defendant, played by an actor in a fur-lined tunic, sat glumly and uttered no "to be, or not to be" soliloquies.

He was surrounded by "the heartache and the

[1] Associated Press for the article " 'Brilliant' Hamlet Convicted 10–2," by Ravi Nessman, taken from *The Edmonton Journal*, November 14, 1994, page C4. Reprinted by permission of Associated Press.

thousand natural shocks" of lawyers wearing expensive suits and sipping mineral water, resisting any urge to call them "arrant knaves, all."

The often whimsical trial focused on the scene in Shakespeare's tragedy when Hamlet heard rustling behind a curtain, lunged with his sword and killed the hiding Polonius.

In Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet initially believes he killed King Claudius, who earlier had killed his father.

The prosecution argued Hamlet rationally tried to kill Claudius to avenge his father and only feigned madness to protect himself.

"At the time of the actual slaying, Prince Hamlet knew precisely what he was doing," Phelan said.

"He was not suffering from any mental disorder."

Dr. Alan Stone, a professor of law and psychiatry at Harvard, testified that the prince was sane, even though the play depicts Hamlet conversing with the ghost of his dead father.

Hamlet was not hallucinating the ghost because the ghost was real, Stone said. Nor was Hamlet paranoid, he said, because everyone in the play really was against him; and he was not suicidal, only philosophical.

"Those speeches are not about suicide. They are about a situation of a man caught in an immoral world," Stone said. "Those are reflections on the human condition."

a. Do you agree with the findings of the jury? Explain why or why not.

b. What do you think of Dr. Alan Stone's comments that Hamlet's speeches are not about suicide but "about a situation of a man caught in an immoral world"? To what extent do you think this is an accurate assessment of Hamlet?

Compare your responses with those in the Appendix, Section 3: Enrichment.

Anachronisms in *Hamlet*

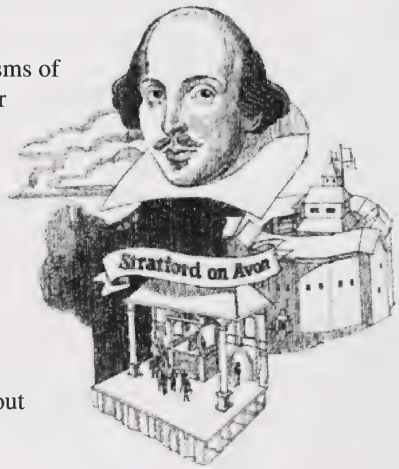
Have you ever watched a movie set in another era and noticed something that didn't belong in that historical period. To use an obvious (but unlikely) example, maybe the action is set in the nineteenth century, but one of the characters is wearing a wristwatch. Such an occurrence would be an example of an anachronism, a person, thing, or idea, that's chronologically out of place.

The era in which *Hamlet* is supposed to take place isn't stated, and it cannot be placed exactly. However, since Claudius speaks of collecting tribute from England, it must take place about the time of the Danish invasions of England in the ninth and tenth centuries. Certainly it seems safe to assume that it was before the Norman Conquest in 1066.

Consequently, the following references may be considered to be anachronisms.

- Cannon (Act 1, Scene 2, line 126). Cannons weren't used until the fourteenth century.
- Barbary horses (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 143 and 144). These animals weren't imported into Europe from Africa until the sixteenth century.
- Switzers (Swiss mercenaries) as the King's bodyguard (Act 4, Scene 5, line 95). Shakespeare was thinking of the French kings' custom of having Swiss bodyguards, something again out of place in tenth-century Denmark.

- Crowner's quest law (Act 5, Scene 1, line 22). The coroner was a Norman official and thus not known in England before 1066.



Shakespeare, of course, was fully aware of the anachronisms of his play. They aren't included because he was ignorant or careless but rather because scrupulous attention to historical accuracy simply didn't concern him. If there were a sound literary or dramatic reason for referring to something, Shakespeare simply didn't consider historical veracity to be a serious reason to omit it.

3. Can you identify any other anachronisms in *Hamlet*? List as many as you can. (Hints: Think about Hamlet's activities before the play begins and his discussion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about actor troupes in Denmark.)

Compare your response with the one in the Appendix, Section 3: Enrichment.

And Now for Something Completely Different

Hamlet, though a wonderful play, can be heavy slogging the first time through. To finish up your module on a lighter note, read the article by Tony Gabriell that follows. There are no questions to respond to; simply read for enjoyment.

'Sequels, Willie – That's What Sells'[1]

William Shakespeare sits frowning at the screen of his home computer. He is having a hard time with the script revisions on *Hamlet II: Return to Elsinore*.

Shakespeare had not wanted to do the sequel, but his agent had talked him into it. "Sequels, Willie, sequels," the agent had said. "That's what the public wants nowadays. Look at this year's big releases: *Back to the Future III*, *Die Hard II*, *Rambo IV* coming up. Last year, *Lethal Weapon II* and the last Indiana Jones, boffo. Sequels are where the megabucks are."

"But, forsooth, I have tried sequels," Shakespeare had noted. "Recallest *Henry VI*"?

His agent rolled his eyes. "Will, Will, sweetheart," he said, "good idea, wrong property. All those Yorks and Lancasters and Warwicks and Gloucesters and Kents and all of them wearing helmets so they all looked alike, who could keep them straight? You need a high-concept show. *Hamlet* was your biggest hit, work up a sequel to that."

Shakespeare protested that he didn't see how *Hamlet* could have a sequel, since almost everybody in it wound up dead.

"Heck, there are ways around that. Say it was all a dream sequence, they're not really dead. Sure, you could open with a flashback to the big soliloquy, when Hamlet says, 'To sleep, perchance to dream,' and we do one of those wavy dream dissolves."

Shakespeare gives it a try. He loads in his Super Iambic Pentameter word processing program and, after six weeks, he has a first draft of a script. He shows the script to a producer, who says it is too sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. It needs more action scenes.

The dream-sequence idea is discarded. In the new draft, Hamlet, Horatio, Claudius, Gertrude and Ophelia have all faked their deaths. It is a plot designed to trick Fortinbras, who now thinks he can march in and take over Denmark without

[1] Newport News Daily Press Inc. for the article " 'Sequels, Willie – That's What Sells', " by Tony Gabriele, taken from *The Edmonton Journal*, June 14, 1990, page E10. Reprinted by permission of the Newport News Daily Press Inc.

opposition. When his guard is down, the conspirators infiltrate Elsinore for a spectacular climactic battle.

The production designer is coming up with sketches for state-of-the-art battering rams and siege engines. A full-size replica of Elsinore Castle will be built and blown to smithereens. The special-effects budget looks like at least $15 million. Shakespeare is getting nervous, especially after they tell him that, with all the action scenes, they will only require about 20 pages of dialogue.

He asks if maybe they would prefer a prequel, showing Hamlet during his lighthearted college days with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at Paris, sort of an Elizabethan *Animal House*. "Change it to Oxford," advises his agent, "and maybe we can interest *Masterpiece Theatre*."

Meanwhile, the producer has begun planning for *Hamlet III*. This one, the producer has decided, will feature the casting gimmick of a special guest appearance by Macbeth. "Nay, he also dieth, at the end of *Macbeth*," protests Shakespeare.

"Not necessarily," replies the producer. "You had him get killed offstage. We never see the body. We'll say he killed Macduff, then switched clothes with him and got away before anybody was the wiser."

The basic story line, the producer tells Shakespeare, is that Hamlet and Ophelia are honeymooning in Scotland and they run into Macbeth who, having waded in blood so deep that to go back were as tedious as to over, has resumed his murderous ways. "Also, we need something new instead of all that swordplay," he continues, "so Macbeth will have bulked up and become a martial-arts expert. We doubt we can interest Arnold in the role, but maybe Dolph Lundgren..."

"Hold, enough!" cries Shakespeare. "Is there naught that passeth for entertainment anymore, save these overblown, overstuffed sequels?"

Yes, the producer say, there is always an audience for tales of illicit, steamy sex and adultery.

Next week, Shakespeare will start the first draft of *Romeo and Juliet and Beatrice and Benedick*.

Conclusion

Hamlet finally fulfils the request his father made of him high on the battlements of Elsinore. But at what cost? The slaughter at the end of the play, Fortinbras tells us, resembles a battlefield. But Elizabethans would have been satisfied. Order has been restored to Denmark; the evil king is dead.

You've now completed your study of *Hamlet*. You should understand the action of the entire play along with the changing and fascinating character of Hamlet himself. You've also carefully examined the key motifs in the play as well as the major character foils. At this point you should be prepared to write a critical essay on the play.

Assignment Booklet

ASSIGNMENT

In your Assignment Booklet complete the assignment for this section.

MODULE SUMMARY

Hamlet is the tragedy of a young man forced into ruthless deeds while maintaining his honour and remaining true to his values. Hamlet is a noble character who recognizes the potentialities and inherent nobility of humanity, yet the world in which he lives is filled with evil men and women. Hamlet is disillusioned with the base nature of humanity – the murders, the corruption, the incest, the fornication, and the lechery. It's all that much more painful because he's acutely aware of what humanity could and should be.

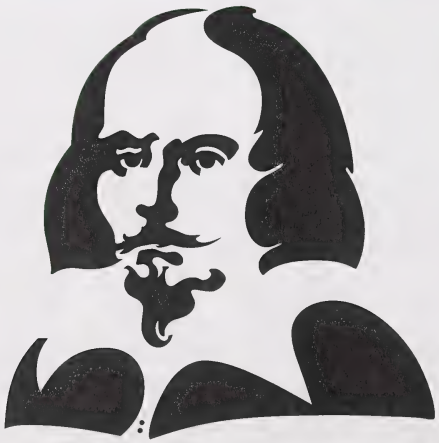
Hamlet seems to be too noble an individual for this world. He questions his role in his world and despises it; he would prefer to engage in pursuits of the mind. Claudius knows this and takes advantage of Hamlet's honour with an unbated sword. Even though Hamlet suspects something's wrong, he's guileless even unto death. By the end of the play Hamlet has come to some peace within himself; he accepts his destiny and his limitations. The audience is left with an enormous sense of loss for this "sweet prince" trapped in a world of clay.

The story of Hamlet is not so much about a search for vengeance as a search for truth. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern relate to the King that Hamlet was "niggard of question," they couldn't have been more wrong; from the play's opening lines, questions dominate Hamlet's thoughts. He poses the timeless questions about human life and its purpose; and in posing them, Hamlet himself becomes timeless. In fact, he simply asks the questions that each generation must ask itself when it ponders the spiritual and moral values of its age. Hence, *Hamlet* is a play for every age.

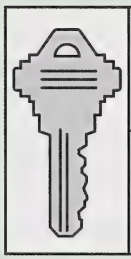
Assignment Booklet

FINAL MODULE ASSIGNMENT

In your Assignment Booklet complete the final module assignment for this module.



Appendix



Glossary

Suggested Answers

Glossary

antecedent action: events relating to a work of literature but which occurred before the action begins

aside: a short speech in a play that is heard only by the audience, not other characters

black humour: humour derived from topics normally considered decidedly unfunny – usually death

blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter

catastrophe: the point in a tragedy where disaster strikes and the protagonist dies

catharsis: the purification of the emotions by way of release and renewal

closet dramas: plays meant to be read rather than performed

comic relief: a humorous scene designed to ease the tension in an otherwise serious play

complication: the part of the plot in a work of literature in which the conflict gets going and begins to develop

conclusion: in a tragedy, the short scene at the end that foreshadows what will happen now that the protagonist is dead

crisis: the climax or, more precisely, the situation that brings about the climax, in a work of literature

dramatic purpose: the precise purpose served by each scene in a play – for instance, to develop plot, to reveal theme, or to develop character

eulogy: a speech that praises a person

falling action: that part of a tragedy in which the fortunes of the protagonist are in decline

groundlings: lower-class Elizabethan theatre-goers who stood on the ground around the stage to watch a play

initial incident: the event that gets the plot of a work of literature going

melodrama: an exaggerated, formula-written drama, usually full of blood and gore, intended only for its emotional impact

motif: a recurring idea, image, or phrase that acts as a unifying device in a work of literature

pathos: the quality that arouses in observers a sense of pity and compassion

rising action: the series of events leading to the climax of a work of literature

soliloquy: a speech in a play given by a character alone on stage in order to reveal his or her thoughts and feelings

tragedy: a dramatic work in which a noble protagonist suffers personal destruction, usually because of a fatal flaw in his or her character

tragic flaw: the shortcoming in the character of a tragic hero that leads to his or her destruction

tragic hero: the protagonist of a tragedy

Suggested Answers

Section 1: Activity 1

There are no suggested answers for this activity.

Section 1: Activity 2

1. Bernardo's nervous challenge is significant because normally it's the sentry who challenges anyone who approaches, not the other way around. This irony tells the audience immediately that something odd is going on, which helps to create a mood of uncertainty and mystery. Shakespeare effectively creates suspense by making the opening scene very mysterious. It's midnight, which is a traditional time for evil to lurk about. As well, it's bitterly cold and there don't appear to be any stars out. The audience is immediately puzzled by the events as they unfold. Why does Bernardo challenge Francisco? Why is Francisco "sick at heart" (line 9)? The guards seem jumpy; one wonders why. The emphasis on the word "thing" and "dreaded sight" would make audiences curious: "What, has this thing appear'd again tonight?" (line 21) and "Touching this dreaded sight" (line 25). All of these factors combine to build up suspense and curiosity on the part of the audience to know what's really going on.

2. Horatio is skeptical, and looks upon the whole situation lightheartedly. He says in line 29, "Tush! tush! 'twill not appear."

3. One of the reasons Horatio has been asked to join the guards is that he's educated and knowledgeable about things like ghosts. Also, Horatio would know Latin, the proper language used to address a supernatural being.

4. Marcellus reveals that Denmark is hastily preparing for war. There's a great deal of activity building ships and cannons. Craftsmen are busy working night and day, seven days a week.

5. Horatio explains that Denmark is preparing for war with Norway. The rumour is that some years ago Fortinbras Sr. challenged Hamlet's father to a single combat. Fortinbras Sr. was killed, and as a result Norway lost land to Denmark. And now young Fortinbras, the son of the former king of Norway, is seeking revenge for his father's death.

6. Responses will vary somewhat. The opening scene of *Hamlet* is very powerful. The foreboding atmosphere, the appearance of the Ghost, and the preparations for war all build suspense and spark interest in the play. Shakespearean plays usually have effective opening scenes. You may have studied *Romeo and Juliet* in Grade 10; it begins with an argument between a few servants and then escalates into a city brawl between the members of two noble families, the Montagues and the Capulets. The opening to *Macbeth*, which you may have read in Grade 11, is much shorter in comparison but also very effective. The three witches get the audience involved by their references to a battle and their meeting with Macbeth.

7. The key point is the appearance of the Ghost. Why has he returned? Horatio's allusion to the dead walking in the streets of Rome suggests that the Ghost's appearance is a precursor to disaster. It also bothers Marcellus that the Ghost is dressed in full armour as if he were ready to do battle. In line 109 Bernardo refers to the figure as *portentous,* which means ominous.

8. Of course the appearance of the Ghost in full battle gear is a key indicator that Denmark is in trouble. Horatio believes that the Ghost may have some bad news about Denmark which perhaps can be avoided: "If thou art privy to thy country's fate, / Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, / O, speak!" (lines 133 to 135). In addition, Horatio explains there's an impending war with Norway. All of these things indicate that there is disorder in the kingdom.

Section 1: Activity 3

Writing Folder Response

Responses will, of course, be personal. It's clear that this is Claudius's first major speech to his court since his coronation; however, there's a certain sense of unease that pervades the speech in spite of Claudius's best efforts to appear to be confident of his position and of his abilities to deal with matters of state. It's impressive that he seeks a diplomatic solution to the Fortinbras invasion by putting pressure on the king of Norway, the brother of King Fortinbras. As well, Claudius makes it clear to his two emissaries, Voltimand and Cornelius, that they aren't at liberty to say more to old Norway than what is contained in Claudius's letters. On the whole, he appears to be a capable leader and an astute politician.

1. Claudius makes reference to his brother's death and his recent marriage to Gertrude. Although he's sad about King Hamlet's death, he must remember his obligations to the kingdom and his new wife. Claudius also deals with the Fortinbras threat.

2. Claudius says on lines 14 to 16, "… nor have we herein barr'd / Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone / With this affair along." This means that Claudius has consulted with the court, and its members have agreed to his marriage and ascension to the throne over Hamlet. It's noteworthy that during Shakespeare's time the Church of England would have regarded this marriage as incestuous, and it would not have been allowed.

3. Hamlet's first line is basically muttered under his breath. He makes a pun on the words *kin* and *kind*. He's saying that he's more related to Claudius because he is now Hamlet's uncle and father; however, Hamlet doesn't feel kindly towards him. His second line is also a bitter pun. In response to Claudius's question "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" (line 66) Hamlet replies that he's really too much in the sun. He's punning here on the word *sun*; he really means that he's too much the *son* of his true father to be happy.

4. Hamlet reacts angrily to Gertrude's intimation that he's only appearing to be sad over his father's death. He retorts that he's not just superficially depressed (as is apparent from his dark clothing and looks of dejection), but that he feels inwardly what he outwardly shows.

5. Responses will vary, but most people feel that Hamlet isn't being stubborn at all. It's completely normal and understandable that a son who loved his father as deeply as Hamlet did would still feel the loss two months after the death. In fact, the rather callous treatment that Hamlet is receiving probably says more about Claudius's insensitivity than Hamlet's stubbornness.

6. It isn't really a loving reply at all, especially towards Claudius. Hamlet reveals that he'll obey his mother; the omission of his new "father" is telling.

7. In his speech he reveals that he plans to celebrate this evening with a drunken revelry. The audience learns that he enjoys drinking and will celebrate each toast to himself with a cannon blast – a rather excessive display by most standards.

8. Hamlet is wishing for death. He wishes he could just melt and fade away. But note that although Hamlet sees death as a potential release from the pain he's suffering, he isn't suicidal. When he says, "Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!" (lines 131 and 132), he's dismissing suicide as an option because it's against God's law.

9. a. Even more than the death of his father, the hasty marriage of Gertrude to Claudius has profoundly affected the young prince. He's bitterly depressed about the recent turn of events. Hamlet claims that his father loved his mother deeply and would have done anything to protect her. Hamlet is also outraged because he considers the relationship to be an incestuous one. Hamlet's bitterness over his mother makes him angry at women in general: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (line 146).

   b. Responses will vary, but most people would likely say that Hamlet is rightfully outraged by his mother's actions.

10. One reason may simply be that he hears some people approaching. A more likely reason is that there really is no one in Denmark whom he can trust. Everyone at court supports Claudius.

11. Hamlet is making a biting joke about the haste with which his mother and Claudius married by suggesting that the leftovers from the funeral were used as cold cuts at the wedding. Hamlet is intensely embittered.

12. At first he is very eager to hear everything: "For God's love, let me hear" (line 194). Hamlet is immediately concerned about the implications of this visitation: " 'Tis very strange" (line 219). He then questions Horatio very specifically on all the details – what was he wearing? was he frowning? what was the colour of his beard? Hamlet immediately resolves to join the sentries again that evening in the hope that the Ghost might reappear.

13. a. Hamlet understands instantly that something is terribly wrong. His father's spirit is not at peace; rather it's in battle dress. Hamlet says "I doubt some foul play" (line 254). The word *doubt* means *suspect* in this case. In other words, Hamlet is suspicious that his father was murdered. The last two lines mean that evil deeds will surface even if they were covered by the whole world.

    b. Clearly great turmoil and perhaps castastrophe is foreshadowed here.

14. There are numerous examples; some are the incestuous relationship between Gertrude and Claudius, Claudius's love of drink, and Hamlet's belief that his father was murdered. The threat of war from Norway is also indicative of the disorder in Denmark.

Section 1: Activity 4

1. Laertes advises his sister not to take Hamlet's advances seriously but as "sweet, not lasting" (line 8). Laertes maintains that Hamlet may love Ophelia but "his will is not his own" (line 17). In other words, Hamlet may have to marry for political reasons for the good of the kingdom rather than out of love. Laertes is worried that his sister will lose her honour and good name if she becomes too friendly with Hamlet.

2. Ophelia says she'll take good note of his advice, but she cautions Laertes against hypocrisy. She compares him to an ungodly pastor who preaches to his congregation about "the steep and thorny way to heaven" (line 48) but doesn't follow his own teachings ("recks not his own rede" – line 51).

3. a. Polonius cautions his son not to make friends too quickly and to hold on to those who are tried and true.

    b. He says not to get into a quarrel easily; but if he does, he should fight vigorously.

    c. Polonius recommends that Laertes say little, listen to what others have to say, and reserve judgement.

    d. As for dress, Laertes should buy quality clothes within his means and should not dress ostentatiously.

    e. Last, Polonius suggests Laertes avoid both borrowing and lending money. A loan disappears and destroys friendships, and borrowing turns a person into a spendthrift.

4. Responses will vary. Superficially Polonius's advice sounds wise, even noble. On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the advice centres around one issue – making life better for oneself. All of Polonius's precepts are purely practical and empty of any real moral concerns. Polonius is teaching his son how to look out for number one – himself.

Section 1: Activity 5

1. a. Hamlet is embarrassed about the Danes' reputation as heavy drinkers: "[Drunken revelry] is a custom / More honour'd in the breach than the observance" (lines 15 and 16). He comments that other nations call Danes drunkards, and this reputation sullies their other achievements.

    b. Hamlet goes on to remark that the same thing can happen to a person. One may have many admirable qualities, but one glaring shortcoming can overshadow an otherwise fine character.

2. Hamlet threatens to kill anyone who tries to hinder him: "By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me;" (line 85). This is reminiscent of his comment in Scene 2, "I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape / And bid me hold my peace" (lines 243 and 244).

3. a. The Ghost commands his son to seek revenge for his murder.

   b. Before Hamlet knows who's responsible, he urges the Ghost to tell him so he may sweep to his revenge.

4. Obviously Hamlet must have suspected that Claudius was somehow involved in all this. Remember back in Scene 2 when Hamlet said, "I doubt [i.e., suspect] some foul play" (Act 1, Scene 2, line 254).

5. Hamlet must not harm his mother; her retribution will come from heaven. As well, Hamlet must not "taint" (poison) his own mind; otherwise, he risks losing his own salvation.

6. After the Ghost leaves, Hamlet is somewhat incapacitated. His words are disjointed. He reaches for his notebook so he can write down what the Ghost told him. In all, he is quite overwhelmed by this "horrible! most horrible!" news.

7. The answer to this question is a very complex one; indeed, the question pervades the play. Why doesn't Hamlet act? At this point, it's sufficient to note that running downstairs, whipping out a dagger, and stabbing Claudius is not exactly what Hamlet has in mind. Claudius is now the king, and he's Hamlet's uncle; and he's likely well protected by his guards. Hamlet must be thinking that there would be dire consequences if, without any ostensible reason, he killed the reigning monarch. What would he tell people – that a ghost told him to do it?

   It's important to note here that while it's clear that the Ghost is real, it isn't at all clear that it's genuinely the spirit of King Hamlet. What if it's really the devil, come to trick the prince into committing a mortal sin? Hamlet, in all respects a Renaissance man, was caught between the beliefs that ghosts were agents of the devil that could lead a soul to destruction and that they were the agitated souls of departed Christians.

8. Hamlet's world has just been turned upside down. His world is "out of joint." Hamlet is an unlikely avenger; he doesn't want to have to set his world right.

9. The Ghost is cautioning Hamlet against "poisoning" himself. He wants Hamlet to exact his revenge but also to stay true to his values. Try to imagine how restrictive this proviso really is. This thought is similar to what Polonius told his son in Scene 3: "To thine own self be true" (Act 1, Scene 3, line 78). So the question remains: can Hamlet achieve revenge without forsaking his values? What about Laertes? Will he be true to himself?

Section 1: Activity 6

1. The Ghost comments that Hamlet's eyes would fall out of their sockets if he heard how terrifying purgatory is. In a similar way, the stars and the universal order have been displaced by Claudius's actions.

2. Claudius has committed a double crime. He has murdered his brother and then married his sister-in-law. In doing so, Claudius has torn the very fabric of the universe. He has disrupted the Chain of Being. Hamlet is exhorted by the afterlife to set things straight.

Section 1: Follow-up Activities

Extra Help

1. Claudius is described by his brother's spirit as a serpent. On a larger scale, Claudius has poisoned the entire kingdom with King Hamlet's murder. Hamlet's despair and desire for death, as evident in his soliloquy beginning with the line "O, that this too too-solid flesh would melt" (Act 1, Scene 2, line 129), indicate that he has been poisoned by his mother's infidelity and her contemptible speedy marriage to Claudius. Hamlet has been poisoned against women in general, as is evident when he says "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (Act 1, Scene 2, line 146).

2. a. Hamlet is indignant that his mother would suggest that he's only pretending to be lamenting his father's death. Here Hamlet makes the point that his internal feelings of sorrow match his external appearance (his wearing of black clothes and his facial expressions of unhappiness). Hamlet protests that he's not wearning a disguise at all.

   b. Hamlet is commenting that even though evil deeds have been hidden away, they cannot be disguised forever; eventually disguised offenses will surface.

   c. Polonius slanders Hamlet to his daughter by labeling him a philanderer. Polonius claims that Hamlet is disguising himself as an honest suitor who really loves her. There's no evidence to support this allegation. If anything, it supports the notion that Polonius is corrupt.

   d. The rumour was that a snake bit King Hamlet while he was sleeping. The truth of the matter is that the snake was Claudius, who is currently disguised as a doting husband and "father."

   e. The Ghost makes the point here that Gertrude is not the virtuous person she seems to be. The implication is that she was having an affair with Claudius before King Hamlet's murder.

   f. Hamlet calls Claudius a "smiling" villain because Claudius doesn't appear to be a villain at all. To the populace and people at court he's a stable leader who loves Gertrude and is trying to befriend Hamlet.

   g. Here, Hamlet tells the audience of his intention to put on his own disguise – madness.

3.

	Hamlet	Fortinbras
Comparisons (points of similarity)	Hamlet is a young prince of Denmark.	**Fortinbras is the young prince of Norway.**
	Hamlet's Uncle Claudius has become the next king of Denmark, making Hamlet powerless.	Fortinbras' uncle has become the next king of Norway, leaving Fortinbras powerless.
	Hamlet is seeking revenge for the death of his father.	**Fortinbras is seeking revenge for a dead father.**
Contrasts (points of difference)	Hamlet's father was murdered.	**Fortinbras Sr. was killed in a duel which he proposed. He lost his lands legally.**
	Hamlet is not at all eager to exact his revenge: "O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!" (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 190 and 191)	Fortinbras seems to be spoiling for a fight. Does he want revenge for his father, or is he more interested in his reputation?

4. The disruptive forces are as follows:

   - Claudius has murdered his brother, the king. The king was considered God's representative on earth; therefore, regicide was condemned and feared by nobles and peasants alike.
   - Claudius has married his sister. This was an incestuous relationship by Elizabethan standards.
   - Claudius has seized the throne from Hamlet, the king's son.

Enrichment

1. a. god of day: This refers to Apollo, the classical god of sunlight.

   b. first corse: This is a biblical reference to the first dead body, that of Abel. He was killed by his brother (which makes for an interesting irony here).

   c. Hyperion: This is a reference to one of the Titans – giants who, according to classical mythology, once ruled the world.

   d. Satyr: A satyr, according to classical mythology, was a woodland spirit – part human, part animal.

   e. Niobe: According to mythology, Niobe once boasted of her seven sons and seven daughters to Leto, the mother of Apollo and Dianna. Later Apollo punished her by killing her children; she wept until Zeus turned her to stone.

   f. Hercules: The son of Zeus and Alcmena, Hercules was the superman of classical mythology.

   g. Nemean lion: In Greek mythology, the slaying of this lion (by strangulation) was the first of Hercules' twelve labours. Afterwards he wore the lion's skin.

   h. Lethe wharf: According to Greek mythology, drinking from the river Lethe would make you forget. Spirits of the dead would gather there to drink (to forget the things of earth) before being transported to Hades, the underworld.

2. Translations will differ somewhat. Compare yours with the following:

   a. addition: reputation

   b. approve: confirm

   c. change: exchange

   d. cousin: kinsman (The word lacks the specific meaning of today of the son or daughter of your aunt or uncle.)

   e. dearest: worst, bitterest

   f. disasters: ominous signs

   g. doubt: suspect

   h. carefully: precisely or promptly

   i. happily: by luck or chance, perhaps

   j. honest: in this sense, genuine (The Ghost is not a disguised demon as Hamlet first fears.)

   k. husbandry: thriftiness

   l. impress: press into service (In England "press gangs" would roam around taverns in seaside towns and gather up sailors and "press" them into service in the navy. When these men had sobered up, they would find themselves twenty miles out at sea and in the service of the reigning monarch.)

   m. jump: exactly

   n. sensible: capable of feeling; of the senses

o. soft: hush

p. sometimes: formerly

q. rivals: partners

r. tempt: test, try; (The word was only beginning to mean *entice*.)

s. vain: useless

t. wants: lacks

3. Sandburg makes the point that actors are attracted to the tragedy of Hamlet, his pain and his suffering. They're also lured by the exquisite speeches that Hamlet utters. As well, there's something intangible about this role that beckons every actor.

Section 2: Activity 1

1. a. Reynaldo is supposed to spread some dishonourable rumours about Laertes and then wait to see what kind of reaction he receives from Laertes' friends. Their reaction will either confirm or refute the allegations.

   b. This rather insidious ruse to discover the truth says more about the suspicious and corrupt nature of Polonius than it does of Laertes' character.

2. Polonius exclaims, "This is the very ecstasy of love" (line 103). Polonius believes his daughter's rejection was too much for Hamlet and that's why he's gone mad.

3. Polonius thinks he knows the cause of Hamlet's lunacy and rushes to tell the King. This will lead to additional conspiracies against Hamlet.

4. The audience here sees Polonius as an interfering father. It's also quite objectionable the way he spies on his son. In Act 1 you might have been tempted to describe Polonius simply as an overprotective father, but now his plotting seems more pernicious.

5. The theme of corruption in Denmark is reinforced in this scene. Polonius is no longer the overprotective parent but one who seems viler than was evident earlier. Laertes is also depicted as a spendthrift; he's already asking his father for more money and he hasn't been long out of the country. Perhaps Polonius has reason to be suspicious of his son.

   The discrepancy between appearance and reality is also evident in Hamlet's abnormal behavior before Ophelia. Just as Claudius is pretending to be innocent, Hamlet is feigning madness.

Section 2: Activity 2

1. Neither Rosencrantz nor Guildenstern has any compunctions about spying on his friend. They are both very eager to please the King: "And here give up ourselves, in the full bent / To lay our service freely at your feet" (lines 30 and 31).

2. The Queen provides some additional motivation by promising them a reward for their efforts: "Your visitation shall receive such thanks / As fits a king's remembrance" (lines 25 and 26).

3. The Queen's speech beginning on line 56 comes close to hitting the mark. The death of King Hamlet and the "o'erhasty marriage" are at the root of Hamlet's distemper.

4. Polonius isn't exactly truthful when he says he told Ophelia that " 'Lord Hamlet is a prince out of [her] star' " (line 139). Actually Polonius told Ophelia that Hamlet would say anything at all in order to take advantage of her. As well, he gives the King and Queen the idea that he'd known all along about their "hot love": "As I perceived it, I must tell you that, / Before my daughter told me" (lines 131 and 132). From his earlier conversation with Ophelia when Laertes was leaving, it seems that this is not likely to be true.

5. Once again Polonius exhibits his penchant for intrigue by devising a plan to spy on Hamlet. This time he will use Ophelia as bait while he and the King hide behind a curtain. (Note that some people believe that Hamlet overhears the discussion of this plan; this theory helps explain some of his later behaviour.)

6. Responses will vary, though the evidence in the scene strongly suggests that Hamlet is perfectly sane. Although his words are confusing, they aren't without sense. Hamlet is intentionally punning on words used by others, especially Polonius. Even Polonius is forced to admit how "pregnant sometimes his replies are!" (lines 207 and 208). In other words, Hamlet's replies are full of meaning. It's also noteworthy that Hamlet immediately drops his guise of madness when speaking with his old school chums Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They converse in prose without any hint that Hamlet is anything less than sane.

7. The first part of the speech extols the nobility inherent in humanity, yet Hamlet lives in a world of evil men and women. His reference to dust is to be interpreted in the biblical sense (as in Genesis where Adam is told "… for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return – Genesis 3:19). Human beings are the quintessence – or the finest form – of dust; but in the end, we remain nothing more than that – dust. Hamlet is disgusted by his so-called friends who have returned to spy on him. He echoes the sentiments of his first soliloquy when he says "man delights not me" (line 309). Hamlet perceives his world as loathsome – a "sterile promontory" (line 299). At every turn he's reminded that "something is rotten" and somehow he must find the strength of will to do what he must do. Hamlet recognizes the potential in humanity, but he concedes that people are more like beasts than angels.

8. Responses may vary somewhat. The arrival of the players serves an important function in terms of the plot. With the passage of time Hamlet has become increasingly suspicious of the Ghost's words. Is Claudius really a villain? As well, Shakespeare, the dramatist, also has a problem. How does he make Claudius out to be a villain in the eyes of the theatregoers? King Hamlet's murder happened before the opening scene, and Claudius doesn't appear to be particularly contemptible. The arrival of the players, therefore, serves two functions: it puts Hamlet back on the track of action while simultaneously bringing the murder of Hamlet Sr. into the play and exposing Claudius as the treacherous knave that he is.

9. Hamlet is astonished that an actor could force his whole body to mourn and cry for Hecuba who means absolutely nothing to him. Meanwhile, Hamlet, who has all the motive in the world to "act," has done nothing. This contrast incites Hamlet to criticize himself and wonder if he's a coward.

10. It certainly proves that he never really was concerned about getting revenge for his father; otherwise, he wouldn't have been so easily persuaded to another course of action. It seems quite apparent that Fontinbras is in pursuit of personal glory.

11. Responses may vary. Hamlet's calling himself a coward doesn't necessarily mean he is one. Consider what he has to do. He must kill Claudius – his uncle, the king of Denmark, and his mother's husband. And the only proof he has is the word of a ghost who resembled his father. Time is eroding his conviction that the Ghost was indeed an honest one. As well, Hamlet feels an obligation to show Claudius's guilt publicly. Finally, Hamlet must consider that there would be earthly consequences for himself. Won't killing Claudius mean his own death? And what about the afterlife? Will killing Claudius guarantee his own damnation if he's wrong?

Section 2: Activity 3

1. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern disclose that they really discovered nothing that could reveal Hamlet's state of mind. Did you note that they contradict each other? Guildenstern says Hamlet is "aloof" (line 8), whereas Rosencrantz says he was "most free in his reply" (line 13). They both neglect to reveal that Hamlet ascertained that they were spying on him.

2. Claudius reveals himself to be a man of conscience. Polonius's innocent words arouse his feelings of guilt.

3. Your paraphrasing will, of course, be in your own words. Compare your chart with the one that follows.

To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them.	**To live or to die (or, as some would argue, to be a man of action, or not to be a man of action): that is the dilemma that I face. What is more noble? To endure the suffering of an unpredictable destiny, or to fight an unwinnable battle and perhaps die in the process.**
To die: to sleep: No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to 'tis a consummation Devoutly to be wish'd	**Death is the same as sleep, nothing more. And if by sleeping, we could end the heartaches and the thousand everyday struggles that people suffer, it would be something pleasantly welcome.**
To die, to sleep; To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause: there's the respect That makes calamity of so long life:	**To die – to sleep. But when we sleep, we may dream. Yes, that's the problem. For those dreams that we might have when we've discarded this human shell make us hesitate. That's what makes us tolerate suffering for so long.**
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pang of despised love, the law's delay, The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of the unworthy takes, When he himself might his quietus make With a bare bodkin?	**Who would bear the anguish of the world we live in – the tyrant's injustice, the arrogant man's rudeness, the pain of unrequited love, the slow process of the law, the insolence of people in authority, and the insults the humble suffer – when one could resolve everything with a bare dagger?**
who would fardels bear, To grunt and sweat under a weary life, But that the dread of something after death, The undiscover'd country from whose bourn No traveller returns, puzzles the will, And makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of?	**Who would be a beast of burden, grunting and sweating with fatigue, if it were not that the dread of something after death – the unexplored country from whose boundary no traveller returns – lessens the desire? This makes us choose to bear the troubles we have rather than fly to others that we know nothing about.**
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, And thus the native hue of resolution Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, And enterprises of great pith and moment With this regard their currents turn awry And lose the name of action.	**That's why thinking turns us into cowards and why our resolution, which normally has a healthy colour, takes on the sickly pallor of thought. By this process ventures of great importance go astray and lose their momentum.**

4. Claudius once again demonstrates that he's a decisive leader who doesn't hesitate to respond to a threat. Once he determines that Hamlet is dangerous, he immediately decides to send him off to England. Hamlet, by contrast, is by his nature a thinker and philosopher. For him thinking is a necessary preparation for action. But the longer he thinks about a course of action, the less likely he is to carry it through.

5. Responses will vary. It's most commonly interpreted that by this point Hamlet has perceived Polonius and the King hidden behind the curtain. As a result, he concludes that Ophelia must, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, have joined the conspiracy against him. Hamlet feels betrayed yet again by those who purport to care for him.

   If your ideas are different, are you able to defend them?

Section 2: Activity 4

1. These lines tell the audience that Horatio isn't a wealthy person; he has suffered much and endured his trials with a philosophic calmness. The audience also learns that in the corrupt society of Denmark, he remains Hamlet's trusted and unselfish confidant.

2. Responses will vary. Did you pick out these three parallels?

   - The King is asleep while murdered.
   - The killer kills his victim by pouring poison into his ear.
   - The poisoner pursues the queen.

3. As the play unfolds, Claudius becomes more and more apprehensive. At one point he asks Hamlet if he's familiar with the plot, and wonders if it's offensive: "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?" (line 228). The King is then shocked by the actual murder on stage; to the astonishment of all, he stands up, calls for light, and hurriedly leaves the room.

4. Hamlet is bold and determined when he goes to see his mother. Armed with the proof he's been seeking, he has to remind himself that he should not be violent toward her. He resolves to "speak daggers to her, but use none" (line 387).

Section 2: Activity 5

1. Claudius reveals that despite his crimes he is a man of conscience who feels remorseful about killing his brother. He wants to pray and ask for forgiveness, but he cannot find the words. He realizes that God is unlikely to forgive him because he's still enjoying the benefits of the crime – the kingship and Gertrude. (He may be a man of conscience, but he's not quite ready to give up these things!) He concludes by asking the angels to help him try to pray.

2. Although Hamlet has told the audience in the preceding scene that he's ready to drink "hot blood" (Scene 2, line 381), he hesitates when given the perfect opportunity. Hamlet reasons that killing Claudius while he's praying wouldn't be sufficient revenge in that Claudius while at prayer would be "fit and season'd for his passage" (line 87) and would, therefore, go directly to heaven. This isn't revenge in Hamlet's eyes because his own father was killed with "all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May" (line 82) and was thus no doubt sent to purgatory to suffer for his sins. Hamlet convinces himself to wait until he catches Claudius doing something nasty so his "heels may kick at heaven" (line 94) and he'll promptly head in the other direction.

   Many critics call this decision on Hamlet's part his fateful moment – and therefore the climax of the play. Hamlet misses his golden opportunity, and in deciding whether or not Claudius should go to hell, he seems to be playing God.

Section 2: Activity 6

1. Responses will vary somewhat. In this scene Hamlet displays his ambivalent feelings toward Gertrude. On the one hand, he wishes she weren't his mother: "And – would it were not so! – you are my mother" (line 17). He wants her to realize what crimes she has committed and to suffer for her misdeeds: "… sit you down, / And let me wring your heart" (lines 36 and 37). But one must also ask why Hamlet is bothering to try to reform his mother. The answer seems clear: Hamlet still loves her deeply and he believes there's a chance she can be saved.

2. In line 28 Hamlet immediately asks "is it the king?" As well, when addressing Polonius's corpse, Hamlet says "I [mis]took thee for thy better [i.e., Claudius]" (line 34).

3. Hamlet reproaches her for betraying her godlike husband in favour of a "mildew'd ear" (line 66) and for allowing herself to be seduced by a murderer and a villain. Given that Gertrude is quite shocked when Hamlet says "almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (lines 30 and 31), it seems unlikely that she was involved in the actual death of her husband.

4. Hamlet counsels his mother to confess her sins to heaven, repent her transgressions, and in the future to avoid Claudius: "Confess yourself to heaven; / Repent what's past, avoid what is to come" (lines 151 and 152).

Section 2: Follow-up Activities

Extra Help

1. Charts will vary. Compare yours to the one that follows.

The Case for the Affirmative	The Case for the Negative
Hamlet is unbalanced by the shocking news of his father's murder by Claudius.	Hamlet is only temporarily stunned by this incredible news. He never goes insane.
Immediately after the disappearance of the Ghost, Hamlet is irrational. He compares his head to a "distracted globe" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 98). Even Horatio calls his words "wild and whirling" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 134). Hamlet must be mad.	**Even though his behaviour and "whirling words" look like madness, it's reasonable that it's all a sham in order to throw suspicion off himself and to give himself room to say and do what he wants.**
Hamlet's erratic behaviour toward Ophelia as reported by her in Act 2, Scene 1 is proof that Hamlet is mad.	**Hamlet is simply doing exactly what he said he would do – acting "strangely." His behaviour before Ophelia is simply all part of his plan.**
Hamlet admits himself that he is mad: "… it hath made me mad" (Act 3, Scene 1, line 148)	**Would an insane person know he was insane? Not likely. Hamlet says this line because he was very harsh with Ophelia. He lost his temper, and this caused him to pause to consider his actions. Or perhaps he simply says this line for the benefit of Claudius's ears.**

Hamlet's violent outbursts against his mother in Act 3, Scene 4 are sure signs of an unstable mind. Even his mother says "Alas! he's mad" (Act 3, Scene 4, line 107).	**In his interview with his mother, Hamlet repudiates the charge of madness with these words:** **My pulse, as yours, does temperately keep time,** **And makes as healthful music: it is not madness** **That I have utter'd: bring me to the test,** **And I the matter will re-word, which madness** **Would gambol from. – Act 3, Scene 4, lines 142 to 146** **Hamlet says his pulse is as steady as his mother's and that he would repeat everything he has already said – something a madman would not do.**

2. a. Responses will vary somewhat. The fact that Hamlet tells Horatio and Marcellus that he is going to "put an antic disposition on" seems conclusive proof that his madness is feigned.

   b. Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he is mad in one direction only – toward the King.

   c. Hamlet asks his mother not to reveal to Claudius that he's only acting crazy. She agrees not to reveal this by saying "I have no life to breathe / What thou hast said to me" (Act 2, Scene 4, lines 200 and 201).

3. Responses will vary. Compare your ideas to these:

   Hamlet is always sane in his soliloquies and when talking to Horatio and the players. He seems to switch between madness and sanity at will. He's completely sane when speaking to Horatio or the players but quickly shifts into nonsequitors (illogical responses) when talking with Polonius. Moreover, he doesn't play the madness game with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

4. The King is very suspicious that Hamlet may be a threat; therefore, he sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern before he hears Polonius's "Mad for thy love!" story. The Queen shows some insight when she offers her explanation: "I doubt it is no other but the main; / His father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage." (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 56 and 57). She comes closest to the truth.

5. Responses will vary. The notion in this quotation is that cowards must suffer many ignobilities during their lives because they lack the resolution necessary to stand up for themselves. Each degradation kills the human spirit a little at a time. By contrast, those who are courageous die only once – when they die physically. Spiritually, they remain intact. This quotation relates to the discussion because it reinforces the idea that cowards are self-seekers who compromise their integrity in order to survive. Heroes stand resolute against challenges to their principles.

6. Responses may vary. Like Hamlet's other soliloquies, this one is somber and questioning. The tone is calmly reflective.

7. Although Hamlet begins by meditating on his own situation regarding Claudius, he quickly becomes absorbed in the issue of the injustices that confront all of humanity. He surmises that people withstand all of life's injuries because the only solution – suicide – may lead them from the proverbial frying pan into the fire.

8. Hamlet knows that heroic acts are often done on impulse. For example, people sometimes rush into a burning building to save a child, but would they still do this if they paused a few seconds to think about the consequences of their actions? Hamlet has had a long time to think about killing Claudius and the consequences of such a deed. Would he not be killed himself for such an act? What about his own soul? Will he be damned for murdering Claudius? Hamlet is saying that the more you think about an action, the less likely you are to do it.

Enrichment

1. Pyrrhus, like Hamlet, is seeking revenge for a dead father. Also like Hamlet, Pyrrhus hesitates before he slaughters Priam: "Pyrrhus stood, / And like a neutral to his will and matter, / Did nothing" (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 477 to 479). Hamlet is likewise caught between his will and his matter (the deed). Pyrrhus accomplishes his goal only once his "aroused vengeance" motivates him again. Hamlet also requires further urging before he can kill Claudius.

2. There is no suggested answer for this question.

Section 3: Activity 1

1. Gertrude lies for her son and confirms that he's mad. She says that in a "lawless fit" (line 8) he thought he was killing a rat. She also tells her husband that Hamlet is repentant because "he weeps for what is done" (line 27). These things may be taken to indicate a change of heart on Gertude's part; she now seems to be more on Hamlet's side.

2. Claudius's initial reaction to Polonius's death is quite selfish. His immediate concern is for himself: "It had been so with us, had we been there" (line 13). His concern for Gertrude really seems an afterthought.

3. Claudius is worried that he'll be blamed for the death of Polonius. He plans to summon his "wisest friends" (line 38) to help him manoeuvre out of this political nightmare.

4. Hamlet feels nothing but contempt for his two schoolfellows. He compares these men to sponges that soak up information which the King then squeezes out of them. Then they're ready to fulfil their role once again.

5. Responses will vary. Hamlet's actions don't seem to reveal any contrition. He's hidden the body and is content to play the madman with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

6. Claudius remarks that the citizens are devoted to Hamlet and that it would be unwise to punish him severely. He notes that people will more likely remember Hamlet's punishment than his crime.

7. Responses will vary. Compare your list to this one:

   - When asked where Polonius is, Hamlet responds that he's at supper "Not where he eats, but where he is eaten" (line 20).
   - When pressed further, Hamlet replies that Polonius is in heaven, and if Claudius's messenger can't find him there, the King should "seek him i' the other place [i.e., hell]" (line 35).
   - Hamlet also comments that if Polonius isn't found within a month, Claudius "shall nose [smell] him" (line 37) as he goes upstairs into the lobby.
   - Hamlet makes one last grisly joke when he says that Polonius "will stay till you come" (line 40).

8. Hamlet's been meditating about death since his first soliloquy, so it's not really a new theme for him. Even Claudius's first speech to Hamlet dealt with Hamlet's "obsequious sorrow" (Act 1, Scene 2, line 92). As well, his soliloquies often deal with the topic of death. Initially Hamlet wished that his "too too-solid flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!" (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 129 and 130) and then later thought of death as an escape from the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (Act 3, Scene 1, line 59). In this scene, he departs from this view of death and seems to see it as a kind of equalizer. His point is that no matter what station in life a person enjoys, in the end that person will become food for worms: "… variable service, two dishes, but to one table" (line 25). Hamlet is trying to come to grips with death because he knows that he's facing his own. Hamlet must "answer well" (Act 3, Scene 4, line 178) Polonius's death. He also knows that killing Claudius will likely spell his own demise.

Section 3: Activity 2

1. Responses may vary somewhat. Both discourses are provoked by external factors that remind Hamlet of his dereliction of duty. In the first, Hamlet is confounded by the actor's ability to cry for Hecuba, a literary figure from the distant past. In the second, Hamlet is again astonished by the soldiers' willingness to die for land which "hath in it no profit but the name" (line 18). Meanwhile Hamlet, who has "a father kill'd, a mother stain'd" (line 56) cannot accomplish what his father has requested – not to "Let the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest" (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 83 and 84). Fortinbras and his army spur Hamlet's "dull revenge."

2. Hamlet is at a loss to explain why he hasn't killed Claudius since he has "cause, and will, and strength, and means, / To do't" (lines 44 and 45). His rationale parallels his thoughts in his "To be, or not to be" soliloquy when he says in the present scene "A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom, / And ever three parts coward" (lines 41 and 42).

3. Hamlet explains that true nobility lies not in a penchant for fighting over unimportant matters but rather in a readiness to defend one's honour. It's obvious that Fortinbras has no personal interest in fighting with Poland, and Hamlet comments that it isn't a noble war. On the other hand, Hamlet has been shamed by Claudius and must, from a true sense of nobility, execute the Ghost's wishes.

Section 3: Activity 3

1. Ophelia is distracted and out of her mind. Her speech is incoherent and she's troubled by small matters. In many respects she resembles the Hamlet who earlier appeared before her, disheveled and deranged. Of course, the difference is that Hamlet's madness was likely feigned; hers is real.

2. Ophelia, unlike her father, is truly an innocent victim of circumstances. Her father, whom she loves, tells her to reject her lover. Her lover rejects her. Her lover kills her father. All these events have shattered her spirit; her fragility could not withstand the evil around her. Thus, Ophelia seems deserving of pity and compassion.

3. Responses may vary. Compare yours to the following:

   a. sorrow: "… but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i' the cold ground" (lines 67 to 69)

   b. evil: "Young men will do't [i.e., seduce young maidens]" (line 59)

   c. unfaithfulness: "Quoth she, before you tumbled me, / You promised me to wed" (lines 61 and 62)

   d. death: "He is dead and gone" (line 30)

   You may well have come up with other lines.

4. Claudius mentions the following as the sorrows with which he must cope:

   - the death of Polonius
   - Hamlet's departure (albeit justified)
   - suspicions among the citizens about Polonius's death
   - Ophelia's madness
   - the threat of Laertes who has returned to Denmark (and has been listening to the rumour mill)

5. Responses may vary somewhat.

   a. Laertes forsakes all duty to Claudius, rejects every oath of loyalty he has taken, and is willing to forsake his eternal life in order to be revenged. Hamlet, by contrast, lives under a strict edict from his father's ghost not to taint or poison his own mind against Gertrude while seeking revenge. Hamlet refuses to kill Claudius when he's at prayer because he would then simply be a murderer, not someone seeking justice.

   b. Laertes' primary concern is the calibre of the funeral his father received. Claudius mentions in lines 81 and 82 that Polonius was buried foolishly ("greenly") and secretly ("hugger-mugger"). In comparison, Hamlet's focus revolves around the love he had for his father and the suffering he (Hamlet, Sr.) is experiencing in purgatory.

Section 3: Activity 4

1. Claudius provides two reasons – both of which he feels would appear weak to Laertes. First, the Queen deeply loves Hamlet, and Claudius would not want to hurt her by harming Hamlet overtly. Second, Denmark's rather fickle public would turn against him because of its affection for Hamlet.

2. Claudius flatters Laertes' skill at fencing by relating the story of Lamond, the Norman: "… the scrimers of their nation, / He swore, had neither motion, guard, nor eye, / If you opposed them" (lines 101 to 103). This praise boosts Laertes' confidence to duel with Hamlet. The King also employs guilt by suggesting that Laertes didn't really love his father, and he questions whether Laertes is willing to show himself his "father's son in deed / More than in words" (lines 126 and 127).

3. The King knows that Hamlet is, by nature, a trusting person. Consequently, Hamlet will not be suspicious enough to examine the swords before the duel: "he [Hamlet], being remiss, / Most generous, and free from all contriving, / Will not peruse the foils" (lines 135 to 137).

4. Interestingly, Hamlet isn't willing to cut Claudius's throat in the church as was evident in Act 3. This tells the audience that Hamlet wants revenge but not at any cost. Laertes is capable of "hire and salary" (Act 3, Scene 3, line 80), whereas the noble prince refuses to play the role of the assassin. Hamlet knows from the Ghost's description of purgatory the horror that awaits one who dies "tainted."

5. Laertes' mind is poisoned against Hamlet. Claudius's careful manipulations divert Laertes from his path of truth to one of conspiracy.

Section 3: Activity 5

1. Hamlet first recalls all the wonderful moments he shared with Yorick as a youngster. Then he's sickened by the idea that the skull belongs to somebody he knew. Hamlet next ponders the meaning of life as he considers its cyclical nature. He questions what has happened to Yorick now that he is but a decomposed skull. Throughout the "graveyard scene" Hamlet is questioning the meaning of life when it seems to end in such futility. He finishes his speech with references to women who wear makeup. He states that they will end up like Yorick no matter how thick the "paint."

2. a. Since Ophelia died under suspicious circumstances, the church is reluctant to provide her with all the rites of burial. Laertes, who's still annoyed with the shoddy funeral of his father, asks "What ceremony else?" (line 217). The priest responds that Ophelia's death was "doubtful" (i.e., suspicious) and that a complete ceremony would be an affront to "peace-parted souls" (line 232).

   b. Laertes' concern strengthens the argument made in Act 4 that he's only superficially concerned with Ophelia's passing.

3. Responses will vary. Laertes makes a grand gesture at his sister's funeral by declaring that he wants to be buried with Ophelia. Hamlet's anger at this artifice impels him to challenge Laertes. He subsequently accuses Laertes of bragging about how much he loved Ophelia. Hamlet retorts that a brother's love is really lightweight in comparison to his: "… forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum." (lines 263 to 265).

   Most people see Hamlets's actions here as genuine, but some feel they're stagey – that Hamlet is competing with Laertes in a public display of grief. What do you think?

Section 3: Activity 6

1. Hamlet relates to Horatio his actions aboard ship. One night when Hamlet was having difficulty sleeping, he stole from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern their letters from Claudius to the king of England. In them, Claudius had requested that Hamlet's head be chopped off because he represented a threat to both kings. Hamlet rewrote the letters, but this time they requested that the king behead Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

2. Hamlet mocks Osric by referring to him as a waterfly, skipping over the water aimlessly. He later mimics Osric's speech when extolling the virtues of Laertes. Osric is a court fop – a foolish, affected yes-man at court. Hamlet's comments about Osric's hat are reminiscent of his teasing Polonius about the clouds in the shape of camels in lines 366 to 374 of Act 3, Scene 2.

3. Keep in mind that Elizabethans believed that the universe had been created by God and that its makeup and its history were all part of a predetermined plan. Consequently, every event was seen as fulfilling God's will; nothing happened by accident. Hamlet makes reference to his life being guided by heaven. At this point in the play Hamlet is finally coming to grips with his destiny – that he "was born to set it right" (Act 1, Scene 5, line 191). Hamlet has resisted his role as an avenger since the beginning. Only now does he accept his fate.

4. Laertes shows that he's beginning to have second thoughts about killing Hamlet when he says "And yet it is almost against my conscience" (line 288). However, no sooner does he say this than Hamlet teases him, suggesting that Laertes isn't taking him seriously and isn't trying as hard as he could. This angers Laertes, who then quickly wounds Hamlet.

5. Claudius realizes that to save Gertrude he must sacrifice himself. If he were to warn Gertrude, it would become clear that he had poisoned the wine. In this instant he must choose between his wife and himself. He chooses himself. This selfishness was foreshadowed soon after Polonius's death when Claudius's first concern was for himself – his second for Gertrude.

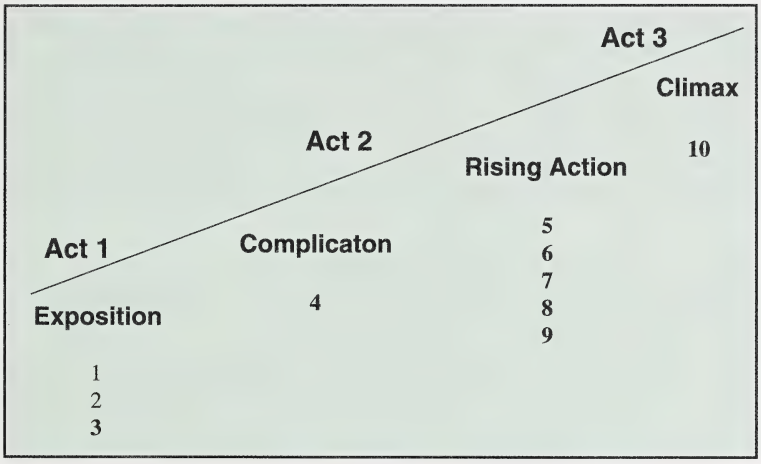
6. The "how" of this question is straightforward. Hamlet stabs Claudius with the envenomed sword and then proceeds to pour the poisoned wine down his throat. The "why" is less clear. Perhaps the sword didn't administer a fatal wound. Claudius does say "O, yet defend me, friends: I am but hurt" (line 317). Hamlet then uses the chalice to finish the job.

7. It's important that order be restored in the kingdom. Order arrives in the form of Fortinbras who takes over the kingship.

Section 3: Activity 7

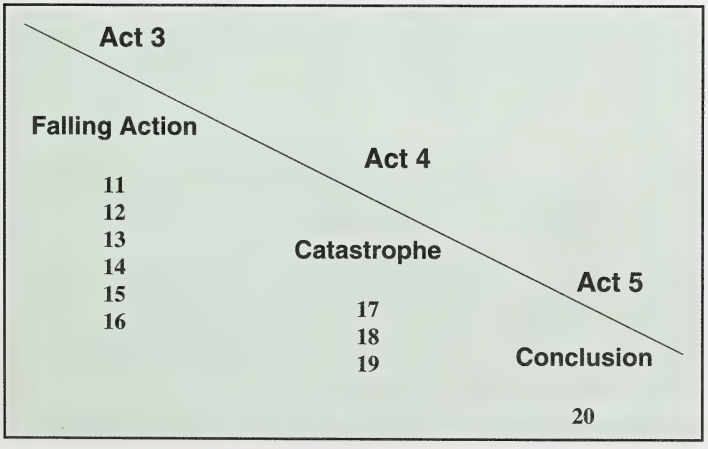
1. a. 6
   b. 1
   c. 10
   d. 7
   e. 4
   f. 8
   g. 2
   h. 5
   i. 9
   j. 3

2. Responses may vary slightly. Compare your chart to this one.



3. a. 11
   b. 17
   c. 18
   d. 20
   e. 13
   f. 16
   g. 19
   h. 15
   i. 14
   j. 12

4. Responses may vary slightly. Compare your chart to this one.



Section 3: Follow-up Activities

Extra Help

1. Responses will vary. The argument presented isn't substantiated by the play itself. There isn't the faintest suggestion that practical difficulties were in Hamlet's mind. In fact, he makes the definite statement that he has the power to achieve his revenge: "Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means, / To do't (Act 4, Scene 4, line 44). Had Hamlet desired to turn the people against the King, he could have done so, for Laertes, who would have less influence than Hamlet, easily aroused them on his behalf. Yet Hamlet never seems to consider this solution; he speaks rather of a personal revenge: "... is't not perfect conscience, / To quit him with this arm?" (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 67 and 68).

2. This explanation doesn't seem acceptable because throughout the play Hamlet assumes that he ought to avenge his father, and his conscience bothers him for the opposite reason – because he's been remiss in not killing Claudius. Also, the theory of conscientious scruples may result from a tendency to interpret the play in terms of modern reactions. Today a person whose character was as noble and whose mind was as sensitive as Hamlet's would likely be averse to killing anyone for any reason. However, in the Elizabethan age the belief that human life is sacred wasn't so widely accepted; violence was still the law of the day, and people believed that it was right to avenge a crime by violent means. You must be careful not to assume that because today society feels it's wrong to kill that Hamlet had the same attitude.

3. While most people recognize the idealism of Hamlet's nature and his intense appreciation of beauty and goodness, there's no general feeling that he's a weak character. When the Ghost appears, he breaks violently from his friends with the threat: "... unhand me, gentlemen; / By heaven. I'll make a ghost of him that lets me" (Act 1, Scene 4, line 85). He can be commanding and decisive on occasion, and Fortinbras feels something royal in him. That Hamlet isn't wild natured is shown by his insults to the King and Polonius and by his bitter speeches to his mother. That he isn't without "strength of nerve" is shown by his murder of Polonius and the fact that he's the first to board the pirate ship. That his character isn't entirely sensitive is shown by his cruelty to Ophelia and by his insensitivity to the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

4. This theory has more in its favour than the previous three, but it doesn't fully agree with the general impression of Hamlet. It's true that Hamlet philosophizes a great deal, but so do most of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. As Bradley points out, there's no reason why a person shouldn't be both thoughtful and practical. Also, it neglects the evidence that Hamlet wasn't regarded as an unworldly philosopher; he was a courtier and a soldier as well as a scholar. He was a popular prince – the favourite of the nation – and he was an expert in fencing. His cool and shrewd handling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and his impetuous boarding of the priate ship contradict this theory.

5. Answers will vary. The key point here is that you use support from the play to back up your theory.

6. a. Hamlet says this in his first soliloquy, after Claudius refuses his request to return to Wittenberg. In this speech Hamlet is comparing Denmark to a neglected garden. He reveals his disgust with the world and the corruption that surrounds him. The implication here is that Claudius is the "gardener" who's responsible for the disarray in the kingdom.

   b. Hamlet is awaiting the arrival of the Ghost when he utters this line to Horatio and the guards. In the speech Hamlet is bemoaning Denmark's infamous reputation for excessive drinking. This leads Hamlet to ponder the fate of the individual. He suggests that a small defect may ruin a person's character.

   c. Polonius is convinced that Hamlet is mad out of love for his daughter. Upon their meeting, Hamlet pretends lunacy and teases Polonius; however, as Polonius points out later, there's a method to his madness. Hamlet continues his observations about the world by saying there's only one honest person in every ten thousand. In this speech Hamlet is echoing an old idea that maggots were created by the sun. As well, Hamlet is saying that the sun-god can create maggots only because there's so much corruption in the world.

   d. Here Hamlet is conversing with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The noble prince is expressing once again his distaste for the Danish court. He describes his world as barren, oppressive, and poisonous.

e. In his famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy Hamlet remarks that the "colour" of a person's resolve to carry through with a course of action may pale with sickness if the person thinks too much.

f. While talking to his mother, Hamlet makes a comparison between the practice of branding prostitutes on the forehead and his mother's marriage to Claudius. His mother's actions have converted ideal love into harlotry.

g. Hamlet, while talking to Gertrude, compares Claudius to a contaminating and infectious ear of corn.

h. Hamlet, while criticizing his mother's behaviour, describes the bed she shares with Claudius as a corrupt pigsty. Hamlet also puns here with the word *stew*, which means brothel.

i. Once again, Hamlet, still talking with his mother, describes Claudius's influence as an infection that's spreading.

j. Hamlet's reference (while talking with his mother) to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as snakes is reminiscent of the Ghost's appraisal of Claudius as a serpent. His former friends are both corrupt.

k. Here Hamlet is observing Fortinbras's army on its way to attack Poland. The willingness of so many men to die over a meaningless military engagement appalls him. He describes it in terms of an abscess, a sore full of pus.

l. Hamlet's discussion with the gravedigger is an instance of but one of many references to the corruption of human flesh that he makes in this scene. Hamlet is preoccupied with the fate of the human body after death. He comes to the conclusion that everyone meets the same end no matter what that person's life has been.

7. a. Marcellus's speech to Horatio after Hamlet leaves with the Ghost strikes at the heart of the corruption in Denmark. Something is rotten and it needs to be fixed.

b. Horatio's words to Marcellus and Bernardo foreshadow the disaster that's about to unfold.

c. The Ghost's speech to Hamlet identifies Claudius as the source of the evil in Denmark. Hamlet's intuitions about his "uncle-father" have been justified.

d. The Ghost introduces poison literally into the play with his description of his own death. Thus the image of poison exists on two levels – the literal and the figurative.

e. Laertes' speech to his sister before his departure to Paris makes the point that the bright promise of youth is prone to corruption by pointing out that canker worms often destroy flowers before they have a chance to bloom.

f. Claudius has just heard about Polonius's death, and is regretting having allowed Hamlet to roam free. Claudius compares his desire to keep Hamlet quiet to a sick man's attempt to hide his illness.

g. Claudius again uses disease imagery while debating how to proceed against Hamlet. He says that desperate illnesses require desperate remedies.

8. a. 1) Hamlet responds quite strongly to his mother's suggestion that he only "seems" to be mourning his father's loss. Hamlet makes the point that his dark clothes match his inner state of mind.

2) Hamlet has violated several rules of decorum with his appearance to Ophelia. A gentleman's clothes should be buttoned, and he should wear a hat at all times. Hamlet's appearance is so out of keeping with his position as prince that Ophelia can't help but believe that he's mad. Hamlet uses clothes here to disguise his true state of mind.

3) Polonius's speech to his son appears, at least on the surface, to contain fairly good advice. But on futher inspection, Polonius reveals himself to be superficial. In this speech, for example, Polonius is explicitly stating that it's not the inward person (his or her character, ethics, and morality) that's most important but how that person appears to others.

b. 1) In Elizabethan times, makeup was associated with prostitutes. In this speech to Ophelia, Hamlet is condemning women for their dissimulation. He believes that makeup is used to disguise an inner corruption.

2) Once again Hamlet is questioning the fidelity of women. He says that no matter how much they "paint" their faces, they'll all end up like Yorick.

3) Claudius echoes Hamlet's imagery here; however, the target of his attack isn't women but himself. Just as the harlot disguises her defects with cosmetics, Claudius hides his sinfulness with a pleasant appearance.

c. 1) Polonius quite innocently remarks that evil people can fool others by acting as if they were good. The irony here is that he's addressing Claudius, who has turned this into an art form.

2) Hamlet distances himself from Claudius with this statement. He tells the audience that he's not capable of dissimulation and that his outer appearance matches his inner soul. Of course, Hamlet will later take on an "antic disposition."

3) After hearing the Ghost's words, Hamlet is outraged by his uncle's ability to fool everyone at court by pretending to be a noble king. Probably in most people's eyes Hamlet comes across as an ungrateful nephew/son. It's Hamlet's responsibility to wipe the smile off Claudius's face and so to reveal his true nature. He will later do this with the "mousetrap" play.

4) Claudius uses the motif of acting to convince Laertes to plot with him against Hamlet. He accuses Laertes of only showing the outward signs of sorrow but not feeling his loss deeply. Ironically, Claudius earlier accuses Hamlet of being stubborn by mourning his father's death so long.

9. Responses will vary somewhat. The calmness and even temper of Horatio contrast with the confusion in Hamlet's mind. Hamlet appears less certain and more unsure when placed beside his good friend.

10. Responses will vary somewhat. Fortinbras's impulsiveness makes Hamlet's reluctance seem more justifiable. Hamlet is a thinker and is not generally prone to rash deeds. With the exception of his killing Polonius, Hamlet thinks through each course of action. Hamlet admires Fortinbras on one level, but he still believes that thinking is a necessary preparation for action.

11. Responses will vary somewhat. Hamlet is disgusted with people who suffer from affectation. He tells the players not to be histrionic, and he ridicules Osric and Polonius. Laertes' wild gesture at the funeral sends Hamlet into an angry passion. Laertes' vulgarity makes Hamlet appear more noble.

Enrichment

1. a. Hamlet to Claudius and Gertrude (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 85 and 86)
   b. Horatio to the guards (Act 1, Scene 1, lines 56 to 58)
   c. Polonius to Laertes (Act 1, Scene 3, line 78)
   d. Marcellus to Horatio and Bernardo (Act 1, Scene 4, line 90)
   e. Hamlet to himself (Act 1, Scene 5, line 109)
   f. Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 210 and 211)
   g. Hamlet to Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 172 and 173)
   h. Polonius to Ophelia (Act 2, Scene 1, line 86)
   i. Claudius to himself (Act 4, Scene 3, lines 3 and 4)
   j. Claudius to Polonius (Act 3, Scene 1, line 190)
   k. Rosencrantz to Claudius (Act 3, Scene 3, lines 22 and 23)
   l. Claudius to Laertes (Act 4, Scene 7, lines 128 and 129)
   m. Hamlet to Horatio (Act 3, Scene 2, lines 67 and 68)
   n. Polonius to Claudius and Gertrude (Act 2, Scene 2, line 90)
   o. Claudius to Laertes (Act 4, Scene 5, line 215)
   p. Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 10 and 11)

q. Hamlet to Gertrude (Act 3, Scene 4, lines 95 and 96)
r. Hamlet to Claudius (Act 4, Scene 3, line 20)
s. Hamlet to himself (Act 3, Scene 1, line 84)
t. Claudius to himself (Act 3, Scene 3, line 38)
u. Laertes to Hamlet (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 237 and 238)
v. Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, Scene 2, line 213)
w. Laertes in front of Ophelia, Claudius, and Gertrude (Act 4, Scene 5, line 152)
x. Ophelia to no one in particular (Act 3, Scene 1, line 152)
y. Hamlet to Ophelia (Act 3, Scene 1, line 121)
z. Horatio to Hamlet (Act 5, Scene 2, line 333)
a.a. Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, Scene 2, lines 77 and 78)
b.b. Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, Scene 2, line 58)
c.c. Laertes to the priest (Act 5, Scene 1, line 217)
d.d. Hamlet to Yorick's skull (Act 5, Scene 1, lines 188 and 189)
e.e. Hamlet to himself (Act 4, Scene 4, lines 50 to 52)
f.f. Gertrude to Hamlet (Act 3, Scene 4, lines 139 and 140)
g.g. The Ghost to Hamlet (Act 3, Scene 4, lines 112 and 113)
h.h. Hamlet to himself (Act 2, Scene 2, line 554)
i.i. Hamlet to Gertrude (Act 3, Scene 4, line 66)
j.j. Claudius to himself (Act 3, Scene 3, lines 61 and 62)
k.k. Hamlet to himself (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 135 and 136)
l.l. Claudius to Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 101 and 102)
m.m. Laertes to Ophelia (Act 1, Scene 3, lines 19 and 20)
n.n. The Ghost to Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 13 and 14)
o.o. Hamlet to himself (Act 1, Scene 5, line 106)
p.p. Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 376 and 377)
q.q. Claudius to Polonius (Act 3, Scene 1, line 164)
r.r. Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, Scene 2, line 351)
s.s. Laertes to Osric (Act 5, Scene 2, line 299)
t.t. Polonius to Ophelia (Act 1, Scene 3, line 115)
u.u. Claudius to Laertes (Act 4, Scene 7, lines 108 and 109)
v.v. Hamlet to Polonius' corpse (Act 3, Scene 4, line 35)
w.w. Hamlet to himself (Act 3, Scene 3, lines 95 and 96)
x.x. Laertes to Claudius (Act 4, Scene 7, lines 57 and 58)

2. a. Responses will vary. Whether or not you agree on the verdict depends to a large extent on whether or not you think Hamlet became insane even temporarily. You may wish to revisit your answers that deal with the issue of Hamlet's sanity to help you with your own arguments.

   b. Responses will vary. Although most critics agree that Hamlet is depressed and wishes for death at the play's opening, there is disagreement about the classic "To be, or not to be" speech. Your interpretation of this soliloquy is crucial to answering this question. Is Hamlet trying to decide whether or not he should kill himself, or is he contemplating how he should proceed and why people in general put up with misery when suicide offers a quick solution?

3. Responses will vary. Here are a few ideas with which to compare your own. You may have come up with others.

   - The setting for *Hamlet* is Denmark around the tenth century, but the court at Elsinore is Elizabethan.
   - The remarks in Act 2 on the acting companies of children's players ("an eyrie of children" – Act 2, Scene 2, line 337) are contemporary references to Shakespeare's time.
   - Hamlet's alma mater, the University of Wittenberg, was not founded until 1502.
   - The foils (light fencing swords) used by Laertes and Hamlet weren't known in tenth-century Denmark.

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